IDENTITIES in CONFLICT:

JAINISM in EARLY TAMIḺAKAM

Thesis submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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2007

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aṟitoṟu aṟiyāmai kaṇṭaṟṟāl kāmam
ceṟitoṟum cēyiḻai māṭṭu

(Tirukkuṟaḷ: 1110)

"The more you learn the more you realise the lack of true knowledge; as I experience when I approach the maid with shining jewels."

(*A.Chakravarti,* Ramshankar Mishra, N.Sundaram, eds, Tirukkural: an Explanatory Translation, Prakrit Bharati Academy, Jaipur, 1999, p.705)

"The more men learn, the more their lack of learning they detect;
'Its so when I approach the maid with well-adorned gleaming jewels decked"

"As (one's) ignorance is discovered the more one learns, so does repeated intercourse with a well-adorned female (only creates a desire for more)"

(G.U.Pope, W.H.Drew, John Lazarus, F.W.Ellis, Tirukkural, 1st published, 1886; reprint, South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society, Tinnevelly, 1979, p.297)

'The more I know you, the more I want to know...'
(Or, so I infer!; and so I seek.)

CONTENTS

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Diacritical Marks used

Vowels

a ā i ī u ū e ē ai o ô ou ḥ

Tamil Equivalents

அ ஆ இ ஈ. உ ஊ எ ஏ ஐ ஒ ஓ ஔ ஃ

Consonants

k ṅ c ñ ṭ ṇ t n p m y r l v ḻ ḷ ṟ ṉ

க ங் ச ஞ ட ண த ந ப ம ய ர ல வ ழ ள ற ன

Tamil Equivalents

Grantha

j h s ś ṣ ks

ஜ ஹ ஸ ஷ ஷ க்ஷ

Note: One is not using diacritical marks in case of modern names, of authors, places, etc. One has continued to use Choḷa (wherever) and not Coḷa. In the latter case one has retained an older usage.

Acknowledging

To Amma goes almost all credit for this work, for having been, besides a mother, a reader, translator, fellow seeker (of her own accord) into the world of Tamil Jainism, and being my pillar of strength and having faith in my work in face of trials and tribulations of time and circumstance.

Amma and Appaji's absence – without having seen its completion – will forever be my greatest loss ever.

This work owes to the hours of appaji-amma extending their hand in my research. If appaji travelled with me through the journey with the Tamil god Murukan, Amma followed suit right after his passing, being a fellow reader. To her, of course, I owe my learning of Tamil, my tāi-moḻi (and knowing the intensity this term signifies). I never realised that all through this time of our readings together that she was being consumed slowly by a strange tumour; that pain I shall carry. She lived the journey of Tamil Jainas with me, through and through, though she did not come to the field. It will be my misfortune to never see those villages with her, as we had planned once the thesis was through.

This thesis would not have been possible had she not stood by me, and been strong for me, after my father's death. I could do little for her suffering, spend even little time and I could not give her the one thing she longed to hold in her hands – the dissertation. I could not be as strong as she had been, when she got immobilised, and slowly passed away, in a quiet that was so typical of her.

In between her passing and this work seeing its culmination, has been a trying, at times seemingly hopeless, journey.

But for friend (in the truest of terms), comrade, support, guide, P. Sainath, this work would not have seen its culmination. This work owes him its final shape (though responsibility for the errors and limitations remain mine). His persistence, rock solid backing all through and his belief in the worth of my work and in me prevented me from giving up after amma's demise. Special thanks to him.

To Viji, and Balu, I say thanks for having been the most tolerant and supportive brother-sister duo. Siddarth, Karthik and Sai Shashank (Golu) helped immensely as well.

I thank the Sunya Foundation and its support (especially Mr. Sivakumar) for granting me the two year fellowship which allowed me to travel across Tamilnadu and sustain myself through that period, and also kindly accepted my situational conditions. I thank immensely, my teachers, Prof. Romila Thapar, Prof. Suvira Jaiswal, and Dr. S. Saraswati, whose support made this possible.

I will be utterly failing in my duty if I did not mention my teacher, former supervisor, Prof. R. Champakalakshmi, for her extreme patience and extremely valuable insights into reading source materials. I sincerely thank Prof. Kunal Chakrabarti, my supervisor, for his absolute patience and endurance in awaiting my draft through my various occupational and other circumstances and for his encouragement and belief at every stage. I thank also Prof. Vijaya Ramaswamy for giving her critical and useful comments on an earlier draft.

Among friends, thanks to V. Udayalakshmi, Safa, Susan George, Tanuja Kothiyal, Radhika Desai, Manjari Katju, Radha Kumar (all of whom have helped in some way in keeping me going) among others I cannot name for want of space. I also owe thanks to Mr. Seshadri (taatha) and Ms. Ambujavally.

I thank all the Tamil Jainas who gave me much more than hospitality; they believed in me and this work. I cannot name each one of them here. I thank the mathatipati of Jina kanci matham at Cittamur, Svasti Sri Laksmi Sena Bhattaraka Bhattacharya avarkal.

I thank Prof. Padmanabh Jaini, Irvatham Mahadevan and Theodore Bhaskaran for their respective inputs.

I also thank the staff of ICHR, Sahitya Academy Library, JNU library (Mr. Mullick in particular), staff of the Government Oriental Manuscripts library in Chennai, staff of the Archaeological Survey of India (Fort St. George), IITS (Taramani), MIDS (Chennai), Institute for Prakrit Studies, Sravanabelgola. Last but not least I thank the following among the Tamil Jainas whose personal collection of texts and references have been utilised in this work – Late Agastiappa Nainar (Kanchipuram), Santhakumar Jain (Mottur), Mr. Jinadas and Vijayalakshmi (Tindivanam, Chennai), Mr. Aravazhi and Anantharaj (Vandavasi).

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Introduction

At the broadest level, the followers or adherents of the Jaina doctrine (or the Jainas) organise themselves in two main components - the ācāryas (monks and nuns}, and śrāvakas (the householders/laity); the history of this sect, then, in its most general sense, is the history of the `preachers` and the `preached`, each component having its own, separate, natures of travails and its own moorings on the question of ` being` and `becoming`.

Substantial scholarship in the past focussed on the Jaina textual tradition; on the Jaina adherents among important dynasties; on contestation (at a philosophical as well as temporal level) with other religious congregations and the perpetual question of `rise` and `fall`. But the śrāvaka history, the narratives of the householders (the `everydayers`), their histories and memories had so far been neglected. Yet recent writings in the history of communities have broken this pattern with question of traditional hermeneutics and interpretations of texts, performance of rituals, the `oral` aspects of scripture and so on.

While the Jaina community had its preachers, texts and a storytelling tradition, the Tamil country, which is our site of interest, has had its long history of bardic tradition, and a `moving` or `circulating` (to use Stein's terminology [1]) tradition. So, too, the history of Jainism in the Tamil country has seen movement and circulation, here, of the eminent teachers – more towards the later (post-Cañkam) periods. The basic scene of Tamiḻakam when the Jaina

[1] Burton Stein, 'Circulation and the Historical Geography of the Tamil Country', in Journal of Asian Studies XXXVII, no.1, Nov, 1977

monks occupied the caverns and rock shelters (as revealed by the Cañkam poems) was that of local cults and minor deities, not yet influenced by the Purāṇic tradition and not yet `pantheonised`. The Jaina religion encountered, in these parts, a plethora of local deities; a religion largely comprising of divination rituals, with no permanent sacred space – the veṟi-āṭal or vēlaṉ-āṭal (the diviners dance) being a `moving` god-concept. It is tempting to agree with Ramaswamy Ayyangar[2] that the setting up of images and shrines venerating a god-concept may have been a Jaina influence, since Jainism laid great emphasis on venerating the tīrthaṅkaras (the 'ford-makers') even though they did not believe in the existence of god as a creator of the universe.

So far as Jaina icons and their evolution is concerned, U.P.Shah[3] refers to the fact that the closest early Jainism got to the idea of shrines (or a dwelling place suggesting rites of veneration) was when Mahāvīra stayed in caityas like the purna bhadra caitya (explained universally by commentators as yakṣa-āyatanas, shrines to yakṣas)[4]; the other, Śāśvata caityas (eternal shrines), were those dedicated to siddhas, worshipped by Indra and other gods and goddesses.[5]

From 'exile' into community

Initially one started with the question whether, in the case of Tamiḻakam, the Jaina doctrine moved from 'marginal' (in

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[2] M.S. Ramaswamy Ayyangar, Studies In South Indian Jainism. V. 13, Vizianagaram Maharaja's College, Madras, 1922.

[3] U.P.Shah, M.A. Dhaky, eds., Aspects of Jaina Art and Architecture, Gujarat State Committee for the Celebration of 2500th year of Bhagawan Mahavira Nirvana, 1975

[4] Ibid, U.P.Shah, 'Evolution of Jaina Iconography and Symbolism', p.50

[5] Ibid, p.50.

its earliest phase, choosing the seclusion of hillocks and rock-shelters), supported by agriculturists and merchants to the 'mainstream' of activity centering around royalty, acquisition of land, setting up of pallis, and contestation with the Buddhist, Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava religious ideologies.

The idea of 'mainstream' or 'universal' is located within the context of expansion of agrarianism, or an agrarian rhythm of life. In this the brāhmaṇical religion cleverly combined mythology with patterns of rural life, creating temple lore, or sthalapurāṇas echoing the concept of sacredness of a river or a water body where festivals corresponded with the agricultural seasons. However, even in Jain tradition Ṛṣabha is said to be the creator of agriculture as a vocation. In the Tamil context, too, earliest inscriptions in rock-cut cave / natural caverns reflect an agrarian ethos. And early support for Jainism came from agricultural communities as well as from merchants and merchant guilds.

In Chapter I ("Discovery of the Jainas: Oriental Perceptions") Section i discusses the interest of Oriental scholars in Jainas. This section is focused specifically on the Orientalists and colonial documentation in the context of Tamil Jainas and Jaina tradition. It deals with 'discovery' of a 'Jain sect' in the south. Section ii ("Jaina Entry into the South and Tamiḻakam") deals with what is suggested in the title. It is also suggested that one can see a movement from 19th century and early 20th century 'discovery' by 'others' to the modern period in Tamil Jaina history, and 'recovery of self' of Tamil Jainas.

Language is important to the Tamil Jaina community history. The Jaina attachment to Tamil, thus, has an antiquity that is

interesting as it is significant, for the Tamil Jainas were as engaged with the modern period of Tamil nationalist movement as in a discourse to ascertain their Tamil linguistic heritage. Chapter II "The Tamil Jaina Community: Questions of Identity (Or, Negotiating Spaces)" addresses this. Jainas contributed immensely to the Tamil textual tradition through the centuries. Cilappatikāram, Cīvakacintāmaṇi, Naṉṉūl, the Kuṟaḷ (Tirukkuṟaḷ), the minor kāvya Nīlakeci (some of the early Caṅkam works) are very few among the many. This chapter also discusses authorship of Kuṟaḷ and Tamil Jaina response to it within the context of identity as Tamil, and Jaina.

In Chapter III ("Nīlakeci: Retrieving a 'Pēy' / Possession Woman") one deals with the issue of a Jaina-folk / popular interface. More importantly, one looks at how the Jaina tradition 'retrieves' a 'pēy' / possession spirit concept to give it a new image (re-casting, or re-imaging, one has termed it) which is more affirmative and 'redemptive'. This would be the first time that Nīlakeci is placed vis-à-vis the three versions of the Nīli story, a villuppāṭṭu (bow-song) version, and a performative text called Nīli Nāṭakam set to music and a few instances from Nīli story in the Saivite Tevāram hymns. This chapter also gives an overview of Jain literature in Tamil.

One believes that instead of reducing it all to a question of rise and decline of Jainism in Tamilnadu one must question the nature of cultural hegemony that prevailed and question the absorption into the overwhelming (in the Tamil context, Brāhmaṇism) in terms of adoption of cults, practices, idioms and cultural symbols to survive amidst the louder, the dominant. And from all this, it is difficult to come to terms with the question as what are the memories of the period of

persecution? It was possible to retrieve some of these memories in narratives from the Tamil Jaina community, which has been dealt with both in Chapter II (above mentioned) and Chapter IV, "Jainas in Epigraphs and Community Narratives: Seeking Historical Continuity."

'Early Tamil̲akam'? An Explanation

The most important question that may be posed about the title of the dissertation "early Tamil̲akam" and how valid is it to look at the contemporary or 'modern' periods and the community in today's context? My answer to this is that early Tamil̲akam is where it all starts, viz. the introduction of Jaina thought in the Tamil country and its spread across the region. Chapter I – section ii deals with Jaina Entry into Tamil̲akam quite specifically; and it only repeats what has already been studied by many great scholars about the entry of Jainism into the Tamil region. What is important is the Chapter that looks at the Tamil Jaina community and looks at the caste question; and the vellalas and merchants who took to Jaina thought. It begins in – with - early Tamil̲akam. One has given an overview of scholarship that has dealt with these questions, in Jaina entry into Tamil̲akam, references in Caṅkam literature and so forth. But one has gone beyond, to record movement of the Tamil Jaina community through other periods.

Early Tamil̲akam, then, is the base, the foundation for a thought and early Tamil̲akam is where the journey begins. But even in reading that past we are in the today; and what happens around us today, the context, the political economic, social, cultural, does inform, and has to inform the way we chose to look at the early periods, or any past (within categories that cannot be compartmentalised sharply

– ancient, medieval, modern) – within that history; or any history within those pasts and those periods.

There is also the context of disciplinary boundaries that become technical issues where history is divided into 'ancient', 'medieval' and 'modern' periods. 'Early' Tamiḻakam also is a consequence of this unfortunate division. Yet, this thesis looks at the community in the present and their perception of history, but at the same time it is also using in the periodical sense early medieval sources such as the Nīlakeci, as well as sources such as inscriptional evidence to reconstruct this history. The effort is to look at the broader canvas of Tamil Jainas as a living community whose history starts in early Tamiḻakam. This should clarify any doubts on the validity of the title.

How does one study the history of a living community – especially a community which has gone through major upheavals in the face of communal / religious conflict and persecution and has had to negotiate its space – cultural, social and religious – through historical time? The Digambara, Tamil Jaina community prides itself for having been in existence in Tamiḻakam since 2nd and 3rd century BC – as evidenced from the earliest lithic records – the Tamil Brāhmi inscriptions.

The Tamil Jainas today mostly live in the North and South Arcot districts,[6] Chengleput, and Tanjavur districts. These are places they are concentrated in, but some are scattered across Tamilnadu (few settled in Chennai) on account of employment related migration. The Tamil Jainas are mostly

[6] One is using certain district names as they were in use over a long time (many of them are still in use, though officially they have been altered many times) in order to avoid confusion. The terms, 'north Arcot', 'south Arcot' in fact, are almost part of the Tamil cultural etymology. .

agriculturists, and very few are traders among them.[7] A small section of Tamil Jainas are in the field of education and fewer still in bureaucracy. Agriculture has been their vocation for centuries and one can still find Tamil Jaina peasantry in the villages districts mentioned above.

When one used the term Tamil Jaina, it almost invariably attracted curious, questioning glances and questions from people. The term itself seemed rather intriguing, interesting, new, to a many. Jainas in Tamilnadu – or Chennai, for that matter – would mean, to most people, the rich Marwari business people settled in certain pockets. These would also be the more 'visible' lot, rendering themselves to class, and community stereotypes in popular psyche. One could also use the term Tamil speaking Jainas, but then again, these mercantile, later migrants (mostly from Rajasthan) to Tamilnadu – Chennai, mostly – Śvētāmbara (mainly Mūrtipūjak) Jainas who also speak Tamil, which is more so to interact with the general populace. It is not their mother language. The Tamil Jainas, in our case, trace their lineage form the earliest adherents of the Jaina doctrine – most of them agriculturists, part and parcel of the larger Tamil historical - cultural landscape, people 'of the soil' so to say.

How did one's association with the Tamil Jainas come about? The stating point, of course, was the MPhil research on the Tamil god Murukaṉ and the 'research pilgrimage' to the six sacred centers of Murukaṉ worship in Tamiḻakam, called the Ārupaṭaivīṭu. The visit to these centers gave rise to a question, initially curiosity, since almost all these centers had a prior Jaina association. Many were situated near, at,

[7]. In fact, this is one reality that amazes people – many from the academic community too - who assume Jainas to be synonymous with trading. The Tamil Jainas in fact distinguish themselves from the Śvētāmbara (northern) Jainas (some settled across Tamilnadu, prominently in Chennai on account of trading) whom they refer to as "seth."

rock shelters, natural caverns that had at one point, been shelters for Jaina monks and nuns. Many of these places still preserved vestiges of the Jaina history. Perhaps, many were still held sacred. But where were the Jainas? What happened to the Jaina religion? One was aware of the literary works attributed to Jainas, such as the Cilappatikāram. But the idea that there still could be Tamil speaking Jainas did not strike one initially. Initially, one was more intrigued by the hidden-ness of this community.

After the MPhil, and during the period of contemplation, a chance mention of Tamil Jainas in one casual conversation sparked the interest all over again. That decided the course. One decided to seek the Tamil Jainas adherents of a faith that had, at one point dominated the entire Madurai Ramanathapuram region.

Most scholarship on Jainism in Tamilnadu uses sources such as inscriptions lithic records, literature and architectural heritage to build a linear, straightforward history of entry, spread, prosperity and decline. Even the inscriptional evidences are used more to reiterate the state patronage to Jainism. Persecution of the Jains is mentioned, of course. Again, limited to the period of 7^{th} to 9^{th} centuries AD. The community – of Tamil Jainas – remains hidden, unexplored in all this. There is no analysis of the 'pacts', the negotiations the community made – in form of subtle changes in perhaps symbols, ways of living, worship, etc – to survive the difficult times. Or of Jainas as a peasant society; or how they addressed the caste system.

Unfortunately, the term 'ancient' itself is taken so seriously that records and 'evidences' depict a fossilised period, a fossilised community that 'was', no matter if it 'still is',.

and 'has been'! What is important is to see the past as it was, until what time is suitably called the 'past'. The changes wrought in the way the community behaves, subsequently, which is a contribution of that past, seems irrelevant, and sadly so. But it is these changes and negotiations for survival that reveal a past more evocatively than can any record of state patronage ever can / could. The marginal numbers of the Tamil Jainas today, and the dominance of certain religious idioms and cultural traits need to be seen together and not distinctly.

Agrarian Context – and 'early Tamiḻakam'

Talking about scholarship on the inscriptional records, and agrarian history n Tamilnadu, again, Jainas (and Buddhists) appear as interesting 'interludes' or aberration – and more often than not are mentioned as merchants, traders patronized by the state, later persecuted, leading to their downfall. The two sects, Buddhists and Jainas again, in these studies, seem mute, non actors in the large socio economic, political history of Tamiḻakam, disinterested, as if, in the mundane affairs of land, administration, royal patronage, resource mobilisation – true to their religious doctrine of 'aparigraha'. What of the land grants to the Jainas? And the agrarian community thus surviving, built over a period of centuries? Was there never serious contestation? What about contestation between Buddhists and Jainas? And the Śaiva Vaiṣṇava movement? Were these all merely religious-motivated? Did not the Jaina community have any worldly concerns or ambitions?

The Tamil Jaina community needs to be recast, as a historically placed community, as agent of history. Hence to stop at 'early' Tamiḻakam, would not answer these questions.

Identities in 'Conflict'- an Explanation

Identities in Conflict would mean a constant interplay of social, economic, political forces that persuade changes in a community's own sense of identity and addresses the question of hegemony and dominance. They perceive their community identity as having been constantly in conflict with other sects. Chapters II, III and IV go into great detail discussing various aspects of Tamil Jaina identity – through texts, language and literature. The controversy over authorship of Kuṟaḷ is objectively and critically analysed from various viewpoints, not just Jaina.

'Conflict' - Persecution

Persecution too, is seen differently. There have been many times when they were persecuted, not just during the Śaivite Vaiṣṇavite bhakti period. The Tamil Jainas peak of other similar efforts of persecution – even during the late 15th century (reference to a story of the king Venkatapati Nayaka, 'Cakkiḷi rājā' and the 'sumaṉtavaṉ talai pattu'). Similarly at various points in history, the Tamil Jainas have made conscious efforts to proclaim their distinct identity and the importance of this distinctness.

"...A fuller understanding of the Jains' own understandings of history is essential if scholars are to gain a better understanding of the Jain tradition as a whole." [8]Thus what one tries to do is to try and understand the Tamil Jain history as they perceive the same, as much as possible and place it in a larger historical context of Tamiḻakam.

[8] John E. Cort, "Genres of Jain History", Journal of Indian Philosophy, Vol. 23, No. 4, December 1995

And a Different Context of Writing History

Lastly but not the least important, a point about one's own context, or placing oneself in a context which urged one to look at the Tamil Jainas in terms of community and identity as a community through history. As students in JNU, we were witness to one of the most crucial moments of contemporary Indian political, social history – the Mandal agitation on the one hand and the communalist upsurge on the other. In this context some of our teachers were also engaging with defining and redefining use and abuse of history in the Babri Masjid - Ram Mandir conflict. There it was a question of blatant violence and disregard for multiplicities of identities. Many of these contexts shaped some of our understanding of history and society, as much as they made us reinstate some of our beliefs whilst redefining some others. Move closer to the 'history' of this 'text', about the Jainas (or Jainism in Tamil̠akam), one was to learn about religious persecution in Tamil̠akam in the 7th - 9th centuries AD; at the time when one engaged with the cult of Murukan̠, as one has mentioned earlier.

Conflict, thus, was not new to the history of Tamil̠akam. While in some cases it was obvious and visible, there were, and are subtle 'negotiations' for communities to survive amidst what becomes dominant and hegemonic in a particular time and context. From 'arupaṭaivīṭu' to the Tamil Jainas, the 'movement' had to happen to retrieve those subtle negotiations and 'survivals'. How far one has succeeded, is of course, a question.

Finally, a Note on the Annexures

The annexures are meant to be purely informative in a general sense about temples, inscriptions, Tamil Jaina villages in the present context, and so forth. In case of Annexure 1 and 3, the lists are meant to show the renewed interest taken by the Tamil Jainas (a group in Vandavasi and a gurukulam in Tirumalai) in recording Jaina vestiges in Tamilnadu. The third Annexure lists references to epigraphs.

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Chapter I: i

Discovery of the Jainas: Colonial and Oriental Perceptions

Col. Mackenzie who came to India in 1782 as a cadet of Engineers on the Madras Establishment of the East India Company had collected a large number of manuscripts, coins, inscriptions, compiled maps, and so on. He had collected a valuable amount of information until his death in 1821 after which his collections were sold to the East India Company.

Nicholas Dirks, writes, "Mackenzie's collection also represents colonial Britain's most extensive engagement with Indian history, a monument to this day of a kind of historical energy and interest that disappeared almost as soon as the concerns of colonial conquest gave way to the preoccupations of colonial rule."[1]

Oriental Scholarship in the Context of Tamil Jainism

Mackenzie had met a brahmin named Cavally Venkata Boriah in 1796 in Mysore, who then enlisted for him the assistance of nine Telugu pandits for the job of collecting manuscripts across the Madras Presidency. He had subsequently collected 274 Tamil manuscripts as Surveyor General in Madras by 1815. C. P Brown copied them in Local Records volumes. W. Taylor's Catalogue of Mackenzie Mss (in 3 volumes) came out in 1862, in Madras. [2]

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[1] Nicholas B Dirks, Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India, Permanent Black, 2004 reprint edn, p. 82

[2] S. Sundarapandian, Aspects of Mackenzie Manuscripts, Government Oriental Manuscripts Library, Chennai (date not mentioned in the library copy. Acc no. E 6711

A letter addressed by Col. Mackenzie to Sir Alexander Johnston in 1817, conveys an authentic view of the motives which led him to form the Collection. In this he notes, "It is also proper to notice that in the course of these investigations...the first lights were thrown on the history of the country below the Ghats, which have been since enlarged by materials constantly increasing...Among various interesting subjects may be mentioned
The discovery of the Jain religion and philosophy and its distinction from that of the Boudh..."[3]

"Of these, the papers relating to the Jains were the most novel... !"[4]

We know that Mackenzie took the assistance of Telugu (Brahmin) pandits in collecting these manuscripts. What they were recording was certainly coloured from their perspectives. Certain local histories got left out in the process of collecting, as most of his assistants were brahmins. Yet in Mackenzie's manuscripts, one can still find some of the local Tamil Jaina stories; the records acknowledge the presence of a local Jaina community in Tamilnadu, not viewing them merely in terms of a pan-Indian category.

In the eyes of the Tamil Jainas, the names of Ellis and the Italian missionary Beschi figure prominently. The former, in his capacity as an officer in the administration, translated the Kuṟaḷ into English. [5] The Tamils hailed Beschi as

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[3] Memoir of Col. Mackenzie, Introduction. Acc No. C118 at the Government Oriental Manuscripts Library, Chennai, pp.1-2. Date of publication missing in this copy found at the library. Emphasis, wherever, mine.
[4] Ibid, p.8
[5] Ellis and the Kuṟaḷ are discussed in greater detail in Chapter II, on the Tamil Jaina community.

Vīramāmunivar, and acknowledged with reverence his contribution to the Tamil language and literature.

There is yet another aspect to it, which is the role of the colonial state and massive centralisation of records. Thus, palm leaf manuscripts that were collected left homes to reach the offices of the state. The individual, and family historical records - especially in communities like the Tamil Jainas where there was a generational aspect to it, who safely preserved these *ōlaiccuvaṭi* for generations - were now part of the state, with 'ownership rights' as well, and entered a whole system of British bureaucracy that essentially meant the 'de-link' of community from their familial historical records.

Let us take the example of the Tamil Jaina community; and the story of the 'Cakkiḷi' rājā which has been recorded by Mackenzie (or his assistants); and also recorded by Thurston. And also narrated to me in each of the Tamil Jaina villages I visited. Had it not been 'recorded' ('written') would this story lose its meaning and significance? That the colonial powers recorded this story (or someone saying, it has 'also been mentioned by Thurston, or Mackenzie also writes about this story') seems to give this narrative a certain sanction, as a piece of history. We only know from these records - Mackenzie and Thurston – that the king in question in the Jaina stories was Venkatapaty (Kistnappa / Dupala / Tubakki Krishnappa) Nāyaka. Only Thurston mentions his caste as 'kavarai'. There is no other record available to corroborate if this indeed was the ruler that the Cakkiḷi rājā stories refer to. It is the Nawab of Arcot in some cases, or just a petty ruler of Cenji in some others, or 'cakkiḷi rājā' in some others. The name varies in relation to the memory of 'good times' for the Tamil Jainas.

There is no way of resolving this puzzle in this moment, but what was being committed to 'official records' of the 'empire' would become, for a long time, the history of the country and its communities, including Tamil Jainas.

The important point for us is the "Discovery of the Jains"[6] as he mentions in his letter. And that it happened 'south of the Ghats' in a sense. That there exists a sect of the Jainas, which is distinct, perhaps came to light from what are today the Karnataka (in his official duties in the wars with Tipu) and Tamilnadu regions.

Before the time that Mackenzie collected the records from the Tamil country, F. W. Ellis was already familiar with the Jaina Tamil literature and well versed in Tamil. Caldwell too had made a point about Tamil's independent origins from Sanskrit. Both of them were aware of a Jaina community and its association with Tamil. Mackenzie's realisation of the 'Sect of Jainas' came in this context. The site of his "discovery" of the Jainas then, was here – in the Tamil region, largely.

The Gazette of South Arcot speaks of the Jainas settled there[7] - "The south Arcot Jains all belong to the Digambara sect and the images in their temples of the 24 tīrthankaras are accordingly without clothing. These temples (the chief of them are those at Tirunaruṉkoṉṟai and Sittamūr) are not markedly different in external appearance from Hindu

[6] Though interestingly, the title for this chapter 'happened' even before one came across this letter of Mackenzie. It was more in sense of what the colonialists and Oriental scholars were looking for, when they wrote of the Jainas, based on a few writings one had read by then. Hence one wouldn't give credit to Mackenzie for the title of this chapter.

[7] Gazette of South Arcot, 1906

shrines, but within them are images of some of the tirthankaras made of stone or of painted clay....The Jain rites of worship much resemble those of the Brahmans: there is the same bathing of the god with sacred oblations... playing of music and reciting of sacred verses. These ceremonies are performed by the members of the archakas or priest class...The daily private worship in the houses is done by the laymen themselves before a small image of one of the tirthankaras and daily ceremonies resembling those of the brahmans – such as those of pronouncing of the sacred mantram at day break and the recital of forms of prayer thrice daily – are observed."[8]

Here is an instance of the colonial state looking for the 'brahminical' in each community that it is seeing. The brāhmiṇs, become the 'yardstick' in a sense for them to evaluate other sects, communities with.

In the Mackenzie's collection' in one of his papers Mackenzie mentions Gummidipundi and Ponneri Parsvanatha temple (Tirupalaivanam). Published as the "Accounts of the Jains" in volume IX of the journal, *Asiatic Researches* in 1807, these form some of the earliest reports on the Jaina community, and Jainism; and this included some of his diary notes of 1797 on the same when he was serving as Lt. Colonel. F. Buchanan[9] added to this biography with his account of the Jainas in the southern part of the subcontinent.

Among works of epigraphy, mention may be made to Luders' '*List of Brahmi Inscriptions from the Earliest Times till*

[8]Gazette... p.78-9
[9] 'A journey from Madras through the countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar', London, 1807; second edition, Madras 1817

about 400 AD'[10] which contains inscriptional allusions to grants of Jaina laity to the monks.

While some scholars believe that most European scholars writing in the late 18th and 19th century were making use of a single, monolithic or lets say, 'universal' textual (canonical) tradition to compile facts about the Jainas and were not familiar about the regional traditions of the Jainas, it would be a question as to where to place the records of Mackenzie, Ellis, Caldwell, or even missionaries such as Pope in the south.

Speaking of western scholarship on the Jaina community, Prof. Padmanabh Jaini notes, "With few notable exceptions, such as Jacobi and Stevenson, most western scholars of Jainism have had no contact with the Jaina community in India. As for their contact with the indigenous Jaina scholarship, it has been restricted to what was available to them, in the English writings of a few notable Jainologists, like Jagmanderlal Jaini, Hiralal Jain and the late Prof. A. N. Upadhye...."[11]

There is a question as to whether the same could be said about Tamil Jainas vis-à-vis the Western scholars or others with an express interest in things Jaina. For, the Tamil Jainas as a community, seem to have great regard for the works of people such as Beschi who was given the title Vīramāmunivar by the Tamils; Ellis (about whose interest in the author of the Kuṟaḷ, Tiruvalluvar one discusses later[12])

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[10] Epigraphia Indica 10, App. L.C.1912

[11] Padmanabh Jaini, "The Jainas and the Western Scholar" in Jaini, ed, Collected Papers on Jaina Studies, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 2000, p. 24

[12] See Chapter II

and so on. According to the Tamil Jainas the image cast on gold of the Kuṟaḷ author in the 19th century is of a Jaina monk. Closest to what they perceive the author of the Kuṟaḷ to be. And Ellis' perception of the author of the Kuṟaḷ was as much based on his own research and work on it, as it was on interaction with the Tamil Jainas of his time.

However, Jaini does make note of the fact that there was lack of attention to the Digambara sect and almost complete focus on the Śvetāmbara as also to lack of attention to the study of Jaina community as such. "...The sociology of Jainism, which in comparison with even the most minor of the Indian religions and cults, has not been studied to any sufficient extent" [13]which he attributes to Jacobi, who, he believes to be "largely responsible for the western acceptance of Śvetāmbara claims to authenticity and for the consequent neglect of the Digambaras..." [14] "Western scholarship has been essentially Śvetāmbara scholarship...In contrast, the Digambara authors like Kundakunda, Sāmantabhadra, Pūjyapāda, Jinasenā, Akaḷaṅka, Vidyānandi, Somadeva, and Śrīdhara, to mention only the most eminent, have been totally ignored. Virtually none of the works of these ācāryas have been translated in the West, and the few notices one gets of Kundakunda in the works of Frauwallner or Schubring cannot be considered adequate...In Europe (and in India, too, I fear) little is known of the ancient Digambaras." [15]

But there were translations of the Kuṟaḷ by Rev. Pope, Rev. Lazarus and Francis Ellis in late 19th century.[16]

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[13] Ibid, p. 26-7
[14] Ibid, p. 26-7
[15] Ibid, pp.28-29
[16] See chapter (II) on the Tamil Jaina community.

Here, one needs to point out to essential problem of general ignorance of the Jainas of Tamilnadu, about whom the colonialists were keeping records, compiling records, and also attributing to the Jainas close link to the language Tamil, in opposition to Sanskrit. Ellis was one of the early Company officials who identified the distinctness of Tamil as a Dravidian language as against Sanskrit. And his proximity to the Tamil Jains also meant there was some interest in Tamil literature and the Jainas. Thus, this statement of Jaini may be true for rest of India, but not so for the Tamil country. But of course, it is a matter of concern no substantial work on Tamil Jaina community ever evolved – looking at the community in historical context - even among Indian scholars who had worked on Jainism in Tamilnadu.

As noted elsewhere, it came as a surprise to the colonial administrators that Jainism existed as a separate sect, quite different from the Buddhism. And in this realisation the Tamil Jainas (or Jainas settled in the southern parts of the country) played their part. And for most part their interest in it stemmed from seeing "Tamul" as they referred to it, as being different from Sanskrit and with its own evolution graph, as a "Dravira" language.

Mackenzie did recognise a Jaina local-ised tradition as evidenced from his collection with assistance from local people. He was aware of the community in Tamilnadu and did not view them within the larger Indian Jaina category, or from within the Śvetāmbara tradition. Similarly Ellis seemed to have supported the Jain claims to authorship of the Kuṟaḷ (and this happened much before the Dravidian movement picked up the already prevalent contentious issue.

Recovering Self through the Orientalists

Interesting though in the Tamil Jaina context was not the "discovery" of the Jainas by these 'others' as much as the 'recovery of self' (in a sense) of Tamil Jainas in the colonial times and thereafter, looking at themselves through works of Beschi, Caldwell, Ellis, and others.

Tamil Jaina scholars such as A. Chakravarti in the 1930s were engaging with these records with a keen sense of how their community or religion was being written about. And in their views which they expressed, one can see in what way the Jainas perceived the works of Oriental scholarship; or the colonial 'recordists', as it were. And what sources they were using to present a certain picture of the Jainas. For instance, A. Chakravarti writes, "the term Ājīvika was originally meant to stigmatise Maskari Putra and his followers as professionals. Dr. Hoernle, in his article on "Ājīvikas", Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, mainly relies upon Bhagavatisūtra, a Śvetāmbara Jaina work for his information about Ājīvikas...(Hoernle) wants to make out hat the Ājīvikas were practically the Digambara Jains...."[17]

He also refers to a reading of an inscription by Dr. Hultzch, of inscriptions found at the Perumal temple at Poygai near Virinchipuram (SII, Vol I, 88, 89, 92, and 108) referring to (according to the reading) "tax on Ajivikas".[18] Chakravarti writes, of this, "It is evident that the Editor Dr. Hultzch makes an unfortunate mistake in translating *acuvakkaṭāmai* as the tax on Ājīvikas. *A priori* it is absurd to suggest that any finance minister would propose levying tax on wandering mendicants who have to beg for their daily food...For our purpose to state that it does not and cannot mean tax on

[17] A. Chakravarti, Neelakesi, Jaipur, 1994, pp.244 - 46. Emphasis, wherever, mine.
[18] Ibid, p.251

Ājīvikas and the rendering given by Dr. Hultzch is evidently wrong....He cannot claim as evidence for his conclusion anything more than the Śvetāmbara work which he takes as his authority..."[19]

Significantly these arguments reflect the assertion of a distinct Digambara Jaina identity as against the Śvetāmbara, as it also reveals the sources that these scholars were referring to.

Finally, the way the Jainas were perceived and written about by Oriental scholars and the way the community was recorded in the manuscripts must be analysed against the historical, political contexts of that time. But the community (or communities) that they were writing on (not necessarily engaging with) also had perceptions and responses to what was being written about them. At least so was the case with the Jainas. In the chapter on the Community and its identity questions one has discussed the problems Jainas had with the colonial Law Courts in the early 20th century which refused to treat them as distinct from the Hindus.

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I: ii

Jaina Entry into the South and Tamiḻakam[20]

Early Jaina vestiges in the Tamil country comprise of about 26 rock cut caves/ or natural caverns, 140 stone beds at the following places, Anaimalai, Alagarmalai, Arittapatti, Muttupatti, Tirupparankunram, (Madurai district) as also in

[19] Ibid, p. 261. Entire argument – inscriptions printed in Tamil, with translations of Hultzch for reference, pp.251-261

[20] This section may be seen as part of the earlier only in one sense, namely much of this history came from reading of the epigraphical records that one has mentioned. But this section places in context the forthcoming one on the Tamil Jaina community and is meant as a general introduction. Epigraphs are dealt with in detail in Chapter IV.

Vikkiramangalam, Karungalakkuti, Kilavalavu, Kongarpuliyangulam, Tiruvatavur and Varichchiyur.

One finds in these places, Brāhmi records mentioning names of monks who resided there as well as of the laity, the donors and these records have been dated between 2nd and 1st century B.C. 30 natural caverns with stone beds – but no Brāhmi inscriptions - have been discovered at Pudukottai, Sittanavasal (of the famous fresco paintings on Jaina themes), and in other places – south and North Arcot districts. However, in the last two mentioned, were found later inscriptions and sculptures – of 8th – 9th centuries AD.

Jambai, Parayanpattu and Tirunatharkunru in South Arcot district have caves supposed to have been occupied by Jaina monks / nuns. Two early Jaina centers with cave beds and Brahmi records have also been found at Kuṟṟālam, Marugaltalai in Tirunelveli district. This being so, the famous Jaina institution, the paḷḷi[21] was also scattered across the districts Tiruchirapalli (named after the famous paḷḷi there) with 3 pallis in Pugalur, Sivayam and Trichy rock fort; Pudukottai, North Arcot, Pasumpon and Periyar districts having one palli each and lithic records.

Quoting from the *Digambara Darṣana*, a Jaina religious text, M.S. Ramaswamy Ayyangar[22] says in 526 Vikrama Śaka (AD 470) a Drāviḍasaṅgha was formed at southern Madurai by Vajranandi (in inscriptions noted as Vaccananti), a disciple of Pūjyapāda. Also that the sangha was an association of the Digambara Jainas who migrated south with a view to spread

[21] The term take coming to mean school, in Tamil, considering that the Jaina doctrine was being expounded upon and taught here.
[22] M.S.Ramaswamy Ayyangar, Studies in South Indian Jainism, Vizianagaram Maharaja's College Publication, Madras, 1922. p.57 (cited in the Journal of the Bombay Royal Asiatic Society vol XVII, p.74)

Jainism. Ayyangar believes this to have occurred by the end of the 5th century AD. Further, he says that the Cañkam works indicate that Jainism has not entered the extreme south of India during the days of Toḷkāppiyar (350 BC) and they must have colonised and permanently settled in these parts during and before 1st century AD. Scholars also take the evidence from Mahāvamśa, the Buddhist chronicle (which treats of Buddhism in Ceylon at the time of its introduction) which speaks of Tissa – Devanampiya Tissa - 2nd son of Mutisiva, and the two chief priests, Mahinda and Aritta who expressed desire to spread the tenets of Buddhism in other countries for which they were granted permission. It is assumed that the Pāṇḍya country should have been one of those they visited. The Pāṇḍya country and Srilanka are believed to have had close relations, considering another mention in the *Mahāvamsa* whereby Vijaya, the son of Sihabāhu, ruler of Lata in Gujarat, is supposed to have wedded the daughter of a Pāṇḍyan king. The caverns in Marugaltalai (Tirunelveli districts) with Brāhmi inscriptions and similar ones at Madurai (dated 3rd century BC) – at Anaimalai, Alagarmalai, Kongar – puliyangulam, are believed to suggest their occupation by Buddhist monks in an earlier period and later by Jainas after being abandoned by the former.[23]

A.Ekambaranathan[24] says that Jainism in Tamilnadu must date prior to 2nd century BC. The Patiṟṟuppattu (Cañkam work eulogising chieftains of the line of Cēṟa kings) 2:42-56 mentioning Iṟumporai kings (a collateral branch) – also

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[23] K.V.S. Subramanya Ayyar, "Origin and Decline of Buddhism and Jainism in Southern India", Indian Antiquary, August,.1911

[24] A. Ekambaranathan, 'Early Jaina Vestiges in Tamilnadu', Arhatvacana, Vol 2 (1) December 1989 (pp. 29 – 35)

mentioned in Brāhmi records – talk of Jaina monks.[25] Two Brāhmi records from Pugalur (Tiruchirapalli district) give the genealogical list of these kings. Among these are Iḷamkaduṅko at whose anointment to the throne, an abode was built for the Jaina monk Seṅkāyappar of Yāṟṟūr (AR 342 of 1927-28)[26]. *Kuṟuṉtokai* 39, (the shorter poems of Caṅkam anthology) and *Puṟanānūṟu* 91 (the 400 puṟam "exterior" poems) mention Atiyamāṉ Netumānañji (as a devotee of Śiva) - a minor chieftain of northern Koṅgunāḍu with Tagaḍūr (Dharmapuri) as capital. This chieftain is said to have dedicated a 'paḷḷi' to śramaṇas (Jainas) at Jambai (S. Arcot). Though no explicit mention of Jainism or Buddhism is found in the anthologies, it is believed that they must have entered Tamilnadu during the time of these anthologies since the Tamil Brāhmi inscriptions are said to antedate the anthologies by 2 or 3 centuries, and these inscriptions mentioned monks and nuns of these two orders.[27] Indra – the important deity of the Jainas as well as Buddhists. Is also frequently mentioned in the Caṅkam anthologies.[28]

In the early Brāhmi inscriptions, Kadalaivaḻuti, officer of the Pāṇḍyan Neduñjeḻiyaṉ, dedicated a monastery at Māṅkulam to reputed ascetic Kaṇinaṉta[29], and for the same monk, Neduñjeḻiyaṉ's brother-in-law, Chaṭikaṉ and nephew Iḷaṉ Chaṭikaṉ, caused to be made stone beds.[30] Another

[25] Ibid, p. 31.

[26] Ibid, p.31

[27] I.V.Mahadevan 'Tamil Brāhmi Inscriptions of Caṅkam Age', Proceeds of Second International Conference Seminar on Tamil Studies, I, 1971. For more details on early Jaina Tamil Brahmi records, see Ch. IV: Jainas in Epigraphs...

[28] George L Hart, The Poems of Ancient Tamil; Their Milieu and Their Sanskrit Counterparts, Univ. of California Press, Berkley, 1975, p. 69.

[29] I.V.Mahadevan, Corpus of Tamil Brahmi Inscriptions Mangulam, No. 1

[30] Ibid, No. 2.

Brāhmi inscription found at Mamandur (at North Arcot) mentions Kaṇimān̲, a local chieftain holding sway over the region around Mamandur (3rd – 4th centuries AD) dedicating a cave to Jaina monks and at his instance the stone mason Chalavan̲ cut the drip-ledge on the upper part of the cave.[31]

"*Pur̲anānūr̲u* 240 mentions Kopperuñcol̲an̲ who is about to commit suicide by actually starving himself to death" ('vaṭakir̲r̲uttal", meaning literally, 'sitting facing the north'), which according to Hart, speaks of Jaina influence; the same verse talks of "dying with a body free of evil", etc. However, Vaṭakir̲r̲uttal, according to Hart, may not be seen as a religious influence of Jainas, and rather as an "indigenous institution" [32]

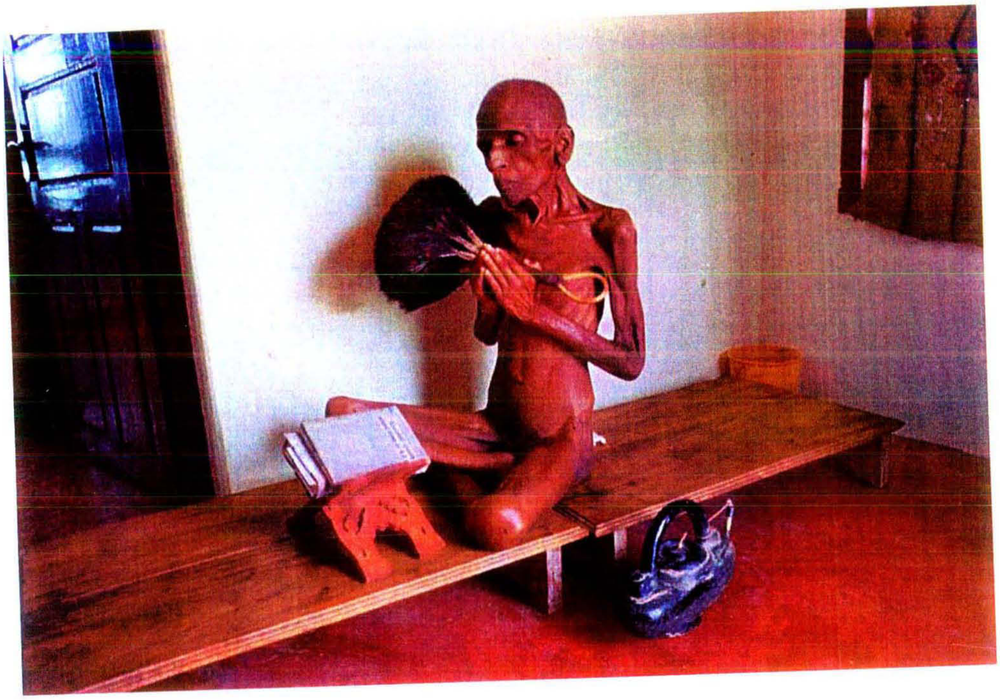
In the early 19th century, the Jainas, as a distinct community, became 'visible' to the Orientalist - partly due to their seeming similarity to the Buddhists, and also due to the interest in a community that so religiously preserved its history and documented its manuscripts. So far, it was

believed (and would be continued to believe, for quite some years till early 20th century) that Indians did not have a sense of history. 19th century, then, saw documentation and recording of numerous manuscripts, the canonical, as well as lay literature, and the Jainas were now entering into the world of archives, to be used for the future.

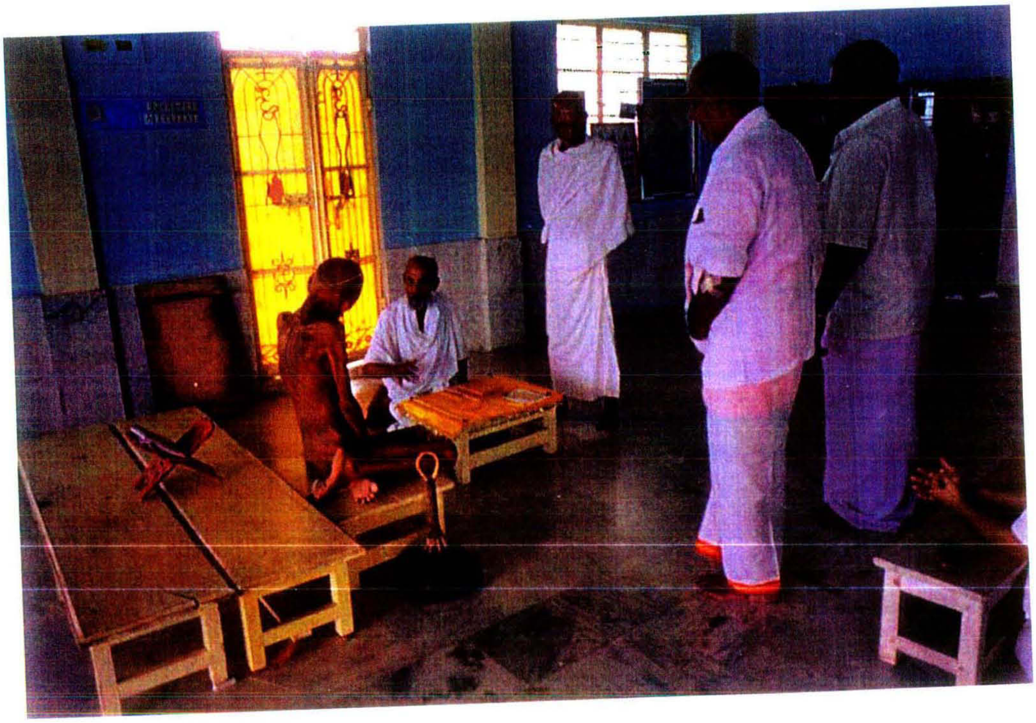
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[31] T.V.Mahalingam, South Indian Palaeography, pp 288-89.
[32] Hart, op.cit, p.90

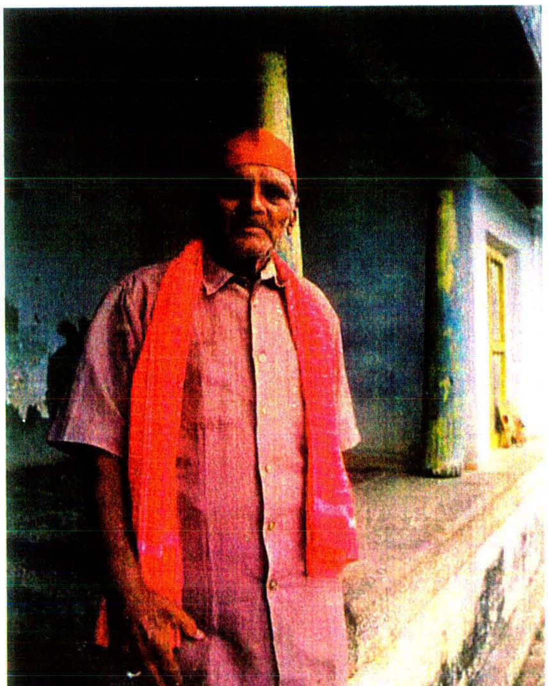


Above and below, respectively: At the Visakhacarya Taponilayam, Nirgrantha muni Subhadrasagar; Siva Adinatha, few Jaina laymen and the muni in an intense discussion over the concept of *arivu* (jnana / perception / knowledge), atman, Jaina siddhanta, moksa and so forth





Past, and the preset: Mathatipati, Jinakanci matham, at Tirunatharkunru Parai

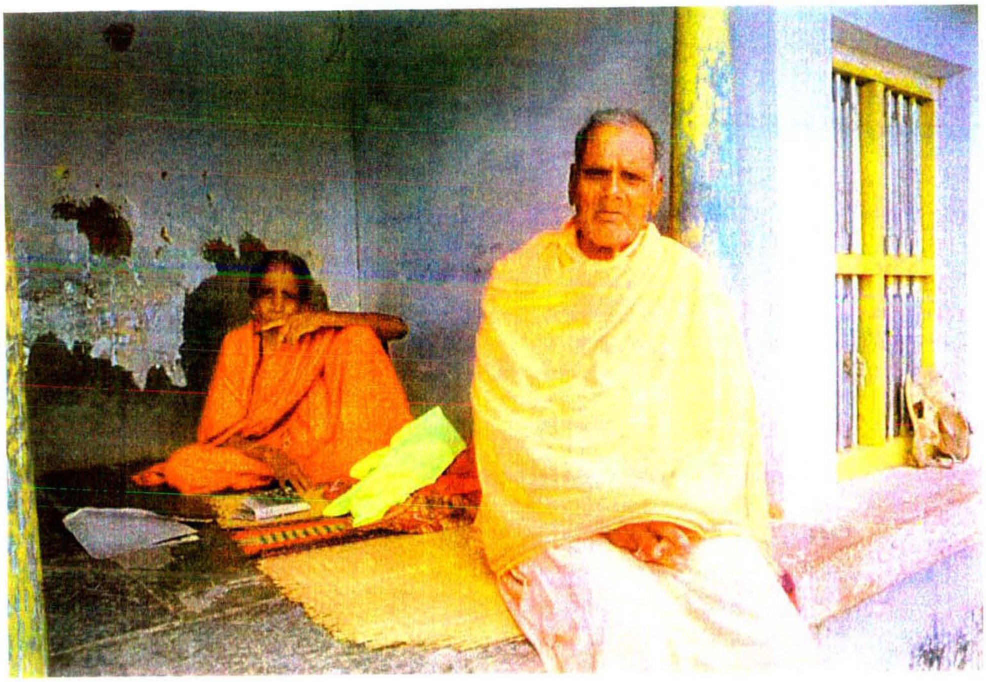


'Chintamanai Navalar' Santhakumar Jani, the living exponent of CIvanakacintamani, at Mottur

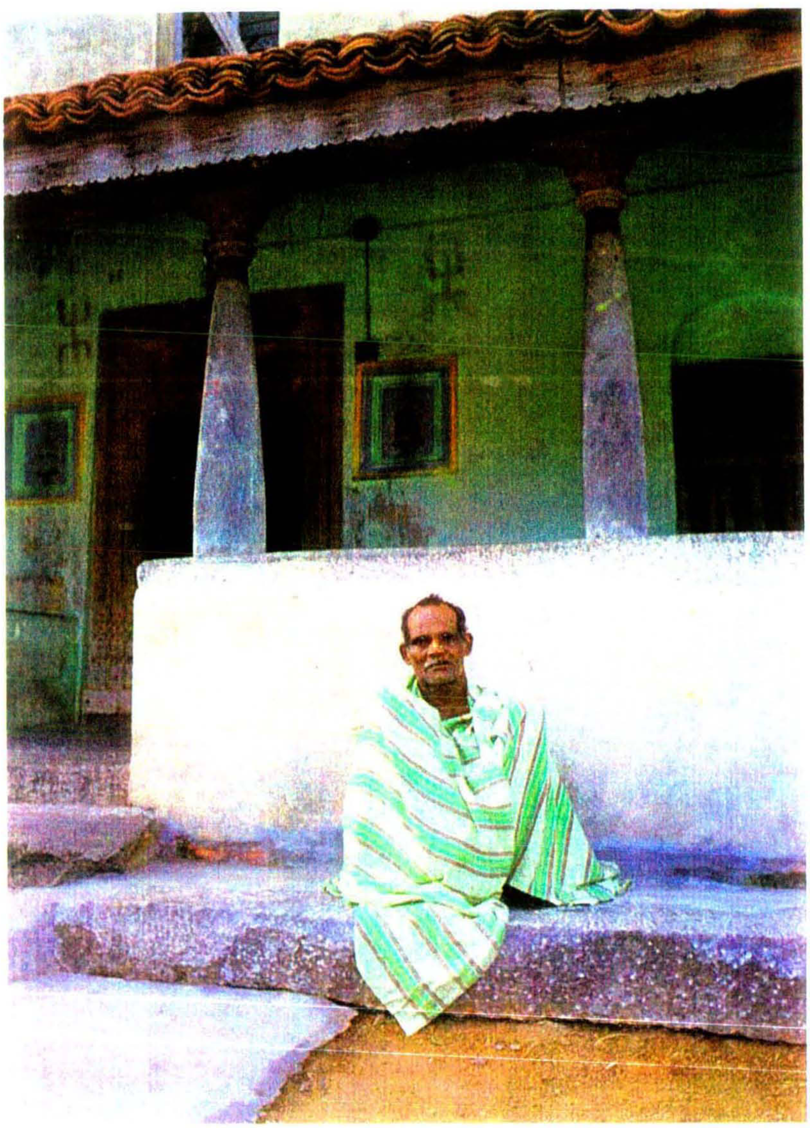


Above and below, respectively: The Melcittamur Jaina Matham, the Tamil Jaina community at the matham, checking out details of eligible bachelors

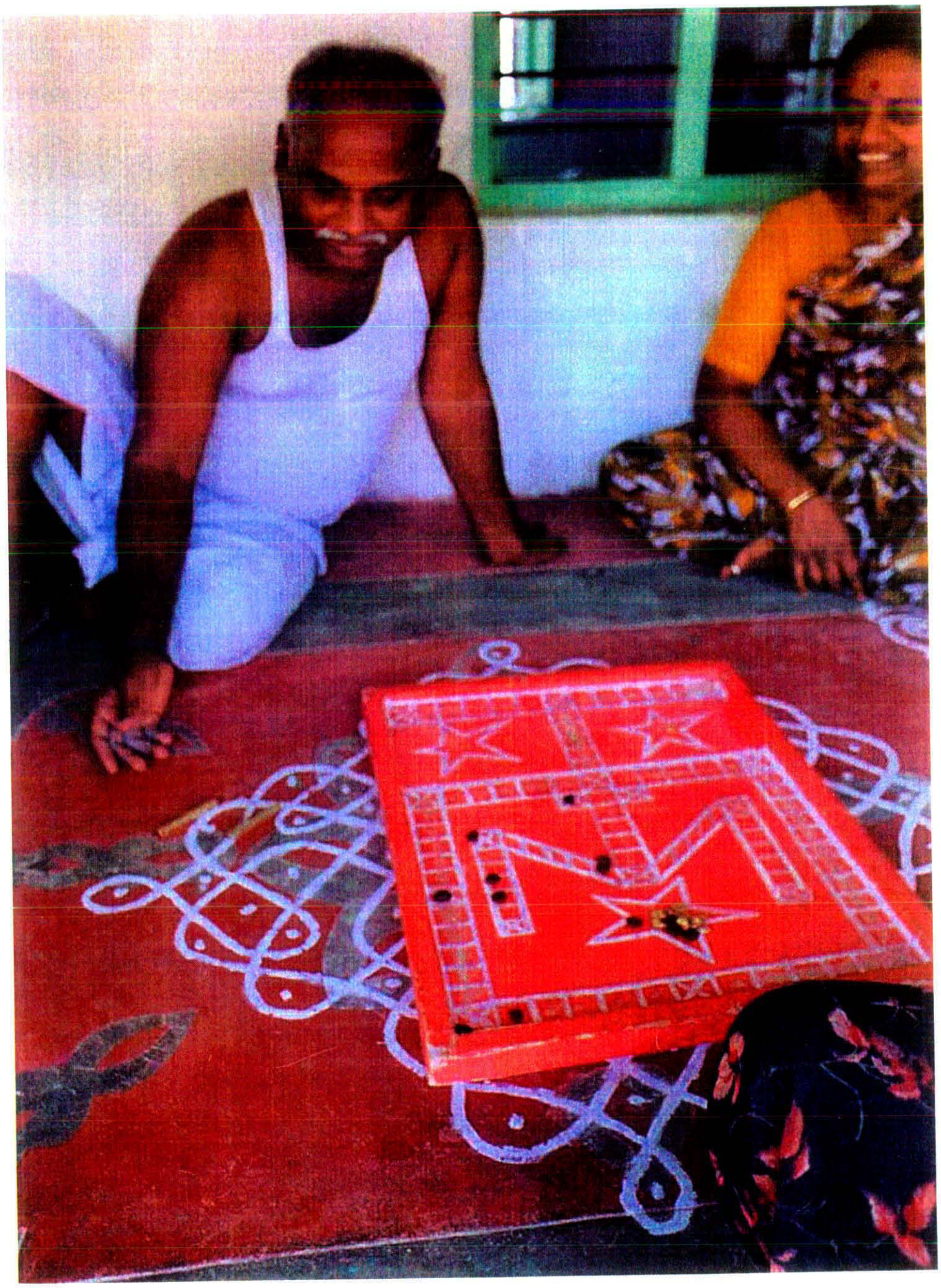




Chintamani Navalar, Santhakumar Jain of Mottur with his spouse



Outside a home at Perumpukai



Getting ready for a traditional game of dice – on the pyol, at a home in Vilukkam



Above and below: The Tamil Jaina community (Dharanendiran, Parsuvanthan, Vrsabha Das, Araha Das, Jeevakumari, Gandharvai, , others) at Vilukkam- where I first heard the story of the 'cakkili raja'





At Tirumalāi : Identity construction over generations



Playing the traditional dāyatu kaṭṭai.: Vilukkam.







M. Karunanidhi felicitating Jivabandhu Sripal – old photograph at the reading room at Tirupparambur, the village Sripal hailed from



T.S. Sripal – photograph – same place



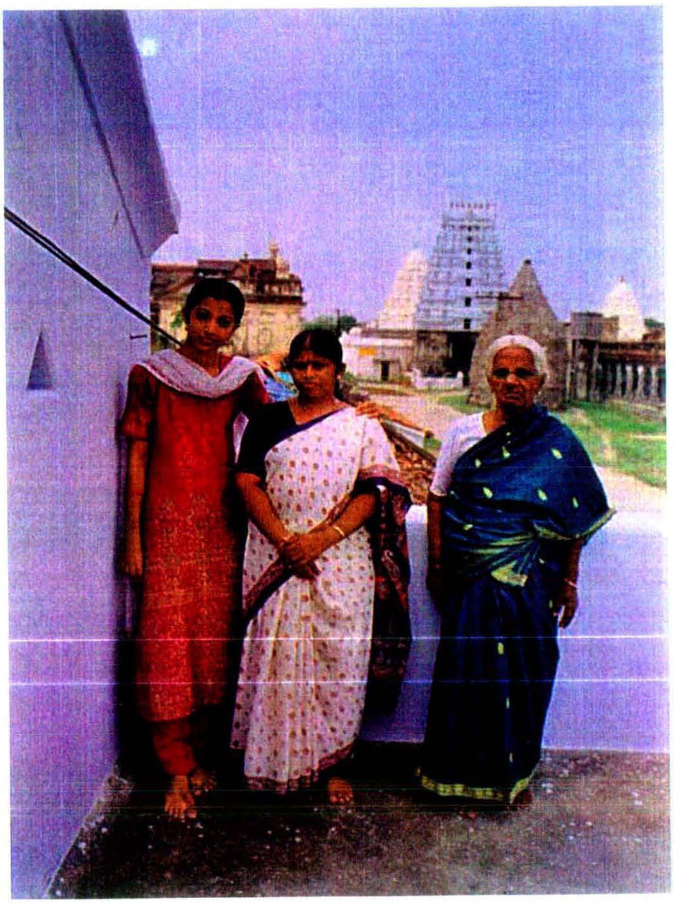
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The family of Mr. Samudravijayan and Rani (at that point, panchayat President); below-daughter Priya and mother Gandharvai





Above and below, respectively: The Melcittamur Jaina Matham, the Tamil Jaina community at the matham, checking out details of eligible bachelors





Women at a Jaina temple, getting ready for worship



Chapter II
The Tamil Jaina Community: Questions of Identity (Or, Negotiating Spaces)

In this chapter one is trying to locate a community and its identity, and the changes through a 'long' historical time. The basic idea is to critique the prevalent tendency among scholars to 'freeze' a living community within set periods and trace and entire 'movement' from 'entry', through 'dominance' (?) and 'decline', based on records of political / state patronage.

'Persecution' and conflict are also seen in different terms, over different periods (not confined only to the period of the bhakti bards). Importance is given primarily to community's own narratives that reflect a situation whereby Tamil Jainas are constantly asserting their identity. Conflict is seen as the 'constant' here, and one is trying to look at the way a community consistently negotiates and works out ways of survival – moving from marginal to mainstream and marginal over and over again.

The community constantly constructs itself vis-à-vis the other – the Śaivites at one point, a Cakkiḷi (low caste) Rājā at another. Even as late as 20th century there is the case of the HMV record being ordered to be banned by the colonial administration for having hurt sentiments of the Jainas.

Speaking of a community that has to locate itself within – or is born into - a 'larger' identity in terms of the religious doctrine it follows, and a parallel, 'smaller' (?) but very crucial identity in terms of the linguistic tradition and cultural idioms is not an easy task. One cannot make any conclusive, deterministic statement on such a community,

which is marginal in terms of both numbers and by virtue of being 'hidden' by an overwhelming mainstream religious idiom. In this chapter one locates – relocates – these apparently parallel identities of the Tamil Jainas who today inhabit pockets of northern Tamilnadu in small numbers in cluster settlements in the villages and in pockets in the smaller and bigger towns.

What is the identity that they now relate to, built as it is, over centuries is a question one will focus mostly on. One will also focus on the caste question which is something hitherto untouched in previous scholarship on Tamil Jainism. Do the Tamil Jainas accept, or follow caste? Are they outside of it, in an idyllic sense, or are there subtle ways of showing adherence to caste system which dominated most history of Tamiḻakam, as it did, elsewhere in India. One also looks at the way prominent Tamil Jainas located themselves within the Dravidian and anti Brāhmiṇ movement as much as with the movement for Tamil language and culture as against Sanskritism. There are conversations, snippets from recent history, and more. One is looking backwards from today, as it were, as one believes that is the way to construct, reconstruct the lived history of a living community, especially a marginal community.

The community also asserts its identity constantly by way of claims to a past and figures of the past that have been 'appropriated' by the dominant communities. The case of the author of the Tamil classic, Tirukkuṟaḷ, Tiruvaḷḷuvar, is discussed in detail. The Tamil Jainas have continued to claim the author of this text as a Digambara muṇi.

And most important of all, the Tamil Jaina community that one is writing about here is a peasant society, an agrarian community. And this is significant, considering the fact that most people (scholars including) associate the Jainas (as a universal category) with only trade. In the Tamil context, the Tamil Jainas have been for generations involved in agriculture and need to be considered as a peasant society. Trade was not their only occupation; in fact many of the Tamil Jaina settlements are agrarian. Most Tamil Jainas one met speak of agriculture as one of the occupational categories devised by their first tīrthaṅkara Ṛṣabha. Most Tamil Jainas also happen to be vellalas. And this peasant society context is mostly negated or relatively an unknown aspect of Jainism in Tamilnadu. Both this chapter and the chapter dealing with epigraphs will address this issue and substantiate this fact of the agrarian society of Tamil Jainas. One of the substantiations is right below.

Setting the Context: History, Issues, Perspectives

"We are Tamil speaking Jainas. We number around 30,000 in Tamilnadu. Most of us are agriculturists. Some are self employed, a few employed in small positions in shops and some other vocations. Some are in government jobs. Inscriptions from the 5th century B.C. onwards that have come to light in Tamilnadu, are mostly those associated with the samanam (Jainas). Our forefathers have given more than their share to Tamil literary and textual tradition.

While the population of Tamilnadu is around 6 crores, we count as the minority of minorities in terms of numbers. Yet, we have not been accorded minority status. We can literally count on our fingers the number of people from our community who have managed government employment.

Thiru V.K. Appandairajan in the IAS, Thiru. S. Sripall in IPS, Thiru T. Vardhamanan in Banking sector...Hence we request the government to include us, Tamil speaking Śamaṇar (Jainas), citizens of Tamilnadu, in the Minorities List.

Thanking you, A.P. Aravazhi."[1]

According to the 1981 census, the total population of the Jainas in Tamilnadu was 49,564 (26,011 Male and 23, 553 Female). The growth rate during the decade of 1971 – 1981 was a mere 20.60 per cent. Interestingly, the growth rate of Buddhists shows a declining Minus 35.98 per cent. "Madras City, Chengleput, North and South Arcot account for 90 per cent of the Jains in Tamilnadu, with the rural population amounting to 11,829, and urban 37,735."

In the course of history human societies have encountered change, rupture, death and decay as also survivals, negotiations, and compromise. Social and other sciences have continued to work around / on each of these aspects and tried to make sense of these. They have for them the 'tool' of time and 'distance' – the luxury if we may say so, of time and a 'panoramic vision, to be able to look at what happened before and what may happen in future.

It is, one feels, important to write of a living subject from the perspective of time, and history. To look at a subject through historical time and yet talk of the current.

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[1] A requisition made to Tamilnadu Government as printed in the journal Mukkudai, issue 29, November 2002, p.22. The letter is signed by the President of the Samanar Pervoli Iyakkam (check exact term). In year 2003, the population figures were 32,700, as per census of the Jaina Youth Forum, as per information of Mr. Aravazhi

I would like to make a note of my gratitude to my mother with whom I had several sessions of reading the Tamil books that I mention in the course of the chapter. That she taught me Tamil, though fairly late in the day, helped me with following the rest of the Tamil texts I could not manage to read with her.

Especially if such an exercise has significance in understanding the larger issues of community, culture, collective memory and shared (and unshared, but forced to be shared) histories.

In this context, one talks of a minority community in Tamilnadu, the Tamil Jainas. Today numbering around 30,000 this community has witnessed and lived through change – at times violent. A community that gave to Tamil a very large part of its grammar and poetry, besides a 'universal' icon such as Tiruvaḷḷuvar (of the Tirukkuṟaḷ) is today waging a quiet battle to be granted minority status on account of its socio- economic and demographic profile. An issue that merits historical, sociological and 'long-durée' (long duration / term) interest, if one may say so.

Largely an agricultural community, the Tamil Jainas are a living example of how a community manages to survive amidst universalised, dominant cultural paradigms, at times negotiating spaces, cultural and social, and at others, resisting these changes, while asserting its identity. They are a living example of how identities are constructed and reinforced and asserted; and also that of non – change, which leads to a community's gradual deterioration (not 'death'). At another level, in the process of negotiating, the community silently accepts the dominant cultural idioms with its own set of explanations for doing so.

And unfortunately such a community as this has been fossilised into pages of history – of 'rise' and 'fall', even as one speaks of dynasties. The fossilised Jain-ism of the bound texts and stonewalls in temples sadly overshadows the living community of Tamil Jainas (many of them still practising agriculturists) and there is as yet no account of

this community and its amazing journey through intense communal persecution. It is important to bring to light the 'today' of this community from the perspective of what was.

And to give it the space it deserves as one of the contributors to a larger Tamil history and cultural ethos. And to see how a community that bases itself on the principles that denounce both caste and a god-concept, gradually accepts these concepts within its fold, forced by the dominant / mainstream reality. And thus manages to survive.

In its survival to this day and its identity as a Tamil community practising Jainism and its intimate relationship with Tamil language and literature, the community makes a fine case for being re - presented in its present form and content. The Tamil Jainas are adherents of Digambara Jaina tradition and settled predominantly in northern Tamilnadu – largely north and south Arcot districts, Kanchipuram. Tamil Jaina villages exist also in Tanjavur district, and a few other scattered settlements in other parts of Tamilnadu. In the early stages of history the Jainas had a large hold over the region in and around Madurai but with the onslaught (or propagation, depending on the way we perceive it) of the 'bhakti' Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava traditions in the region, many of them moved to other districts. The historical vestiges of Jaina religion can still be seen in and Madurai. But no Jaina villages.

One of the prominent Tamil Jaina scholar-activists of the 20th century, 'Jeevabandhu' T. S. Sripal writes, "Research on the Jaina community must begin from Tamilnadu" (with the Pudukkottai Sittanavasal inscriptions dating to 3rd century BC. And many of the oldest Brahmi inscriptions of

the Tamil country (associated with the Jaina faith)...."[2] And "Ādi Agattiyar, Toḷkāppiyar, Avināyaṉār, Tirukkuṟaḷ author (Kundakundācārya) Sāmanta Bhadrācārya, Jinasenācārya, Akaḷaṅkatevar, Koṅkuveḷar.....Vajranandi, Pavanandi......were all Tamil Jaina scholars and ācaryas; of Tamil country."[3]

Early Jainas

Who were the early Jainas? Who were the earliest adherents of Jainism? Which community /caste did they belong to? The chapter dealing with inscriptions gives more details regarding the historical antiquity of the Jainas in Tamiḻakam. Here one may briefly mention some significant points about their early history, which has also been referred to as 'entry' of Jainism into the Tamil country. At this point, one would allude to a traditional Jaina account (common to both Digambara and Śvetāmbara traditions) about the movement of the Jainas to the south of the Vindhyas. It is said that the preceptor Bhadrabāhu acclaimed as the author of Kalpasūtra (the sacred Jaina text), foreseeing a twelve year famine period in Magadha, moved, along with Chandragupta and twelve thousand monks and nuns (this migration is dated generally around 4th century BC[20]) to Karnataka where he starved himself to death ('Sallekhana'); he sent Viśākhācārya to the Tamil country to propagate the Jaina doctrine there (around 3rd century BC[21]) While this is the most well known and commonly held view of Jaina movement to the south (and many scholars do opine that Jainism came to Tamiḻakam from Karnataka, through the Koṅgu region – Salem and Coimbatore), it is interesting to note that the earliest

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[2] Jeevabandhu T.S. Sripal, Samaṇar Malai (Tamil), Vardhamana Patippakam, Chennai, 1996; p. 18

[3] Ibid, p.10

epigraphical record of this event comes not earlier than 600 AD in the Sravanabelagola inscription no. 1 (Karnataka). It would be one's aim to see why was it important to have a written record of this inscription at this time and reiterate an already popular community – perception of a traditional account? More interestingly, this tradition is recorded in Jaina Literature of the 11th – 12th century AD. It may have been necessary, at this period of time (between 7th and 12th centuries AD) to the Jainas to record and reinstate the antiquity of their entry south, necessitated only by the premonition of a famine in the northern (and their original) region of Magadha. This was also, incidentally, the period of contestation for royal patronage among the various sects, the Jainas, Śaivas, Vaiṣṇavas, while the Buddhists had already settled down in Sri Lanka and others moved north into certain areas of Andhradesa.

According to A.K. Chatterjee,[4] "Jaina monks of Bengal and Orissa where responsible for the early propagation of Jainism in Tamilnadu and not those of Karnataka, "and within a few decades of the demise of Mahāvira, "nirgrantha monks carried the Jina doctrine to the south"[5] Thus, "the Jaina religion portrayed in the Cañkam poetry was the undivided nirgrantha religion (of) Pārśva and Mahāvīra."[6]

P.B. Desai believes Jainism came into Tamiḻakam from Andhra (and to southern part of the subcontinent around 4th century BC or earlier) through north Arcot (adjacent to the Telugu country) where Jaina caves and inscriptions have been found.[7] Moving further down, they cross over sea to Sri

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[4] A.K.Chatterjee, A comprehensive History of Jainism (up to 1000 AD), Firma KLM Calcutta, 1978.

[5] Ibid., p. 190

[6] Ibid., p.190

[7] P.B.Desai, Jainism in South India and Some Jaina Epigraphs, J.S.S.Sangha, Sholapur 1975, p.25

Lanka (5^{th} – 6^{th} century AD); and another stream of Jaina teachers flowed in through Karnataka in the 3^{rd} century BC.[8] These were the monks of Bhadrabāhu's congregation under the leadership of Viśakhācārya – moving into Tinnevelly, Madurai regions and "accelerated (the) pace of proselytising."[9] Hence we find more Jaina monuments and inscriptions here.[10] Quoting evidence from Mahāvaṁsa (which he dates in 5^{th} century AD), chapter 10 – "Pāṇḍukābhaya (4^{th} century BC), in his capital town of Anuradhapura, built a house for Nigantha Jotiya to the east of cemetery, Niganthagiri where ascetics of many heretical sects lived."[11] The Nigantha is, obviously, seen as a Jaina ascetic.

While it has been generally established that either through Nigantha (Nirgrantha), Sramaṇas, or Jainas, the Jaina doctrine moved into Tamiḻakam most certainly by 2^{nd} century or 3^{rd} century BC – which ever route it took. The original settlement then, perhaps, of the Jaina monks or nuns, was in the nature of 'exiled', or rather, secluded inhabitation of natural caverns and rock abodes amidst a society seeing them as no more than revered teachers/saints/ ascetics, engaged in pedagogy, expounding a new faith of Jina Mahāvīra – of his many–isms or many–ness, Anekantavada; or pluralism? Or, simultaneity? Gradually, steadily with times (and through pedagogy, and story telling), they moved within the parameters of the working, everyday rhythms of the laity, living in their midst with the institutional structure of Paḷḷis and exclusive rights over what are called 'Paḷḷiccandam' lands. They now battle with the hegemony of the Brāhmaṇas

[8] Ibid. p. 32

[9] Ibid. p.32

[10] Ibid.p.32

[11] Ibid, p.25

in the ways they think most appropriate – though discourse on philosophy; through religion and literature, having already gained a stronghold over some royal dynasties, and also the populace. As the attacks (between the seventh and ninth centuries AD mainly) from the 'bhakti' bards grew more direct and abusive, we begin to perceive in the Tamil Jaina literature too a more pronounced proclamation of the superiority of the Jina doctrine over other systems of thought, including the Buddhist.

Perspectives on Jainism in Tamilakam: Some Issues

The focus of early research on Jainas and Jainism was more or less concerned about a pan-Indian (Universal) category of Jainas and the focus on single textual traditions, research in Jainism has, over the centuries, become more focused on regions, on the different traditions that the Jainas had adopted centuries ago – which the Oriental scholars ignored, or were unable to record due to their limitations. Thereby, a lot of scholarship has emerged around Jainism in the different regions within the subcontinent, which were under its influence. However it must be mentioned that the missionaries if the previous century, settled in various provinces, were indeed (albeit to a limited extent) getting familiar with these linguistic traditions within a larger Jaina tradition.

Most of the scholars concerned with Jainism in Tamiḻakam (and south India, in general) have more or less made extensive use if the numerous inscriptions (with allusions to Jaina monks, or laity in connection with donations), and textual traditions (many Tamil literary texts have been produced by Jaina teachers/monks), apart from a study of the iconographic evolution of monumental structures of Jainas to give detailed descriptive accounts of the period

which saw the Jainas entering the southern lands and enjoying a pride of place among the major dynasties ruling there over centuries, and earning popular support, A point of convergence of all these treatises on Jainas, is the 'rise' and 'fall' (or origin and 'decline') – as we had earlier noted – of the Jainas in Tamiḻakam, as though royal patronage were the only criterion for writing the history of a community.

As we had earlier also noted this kind of history then confines itself to the history of only the preachers the 'elite', the monks who got themselves large donations, the teachers who rose to eminence, vis-à-vis the state and the other elite – the brāhmaṇas, The other major component of Jaina social order, the śrāvaka, the lay householders remain largely neglected. It is only of late that scholars have begun to address this component and the local contexts of Jainism are being studied in terms if the Jaina ideas of history, sense of belonging to a community, and their points of difference – despite visible similarities in worship, ritual, etc – from other religious sects. This comes out in a striking manner especially when scholars talk of the 'persecution' of the Jainas by the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava 'bhakti' bards.

It is intriguing to note, the absence of popular tales, folklore, an oral tradition about this period. Is it possible that the persecution symbolically commemorated in stone (at the Mīnākṣi temple at Madurai) and enacted ritually at festivals, should have no popular remembrances/memory among the 'persecuted'? Or is there a silence that confirms our earlier contention about uneasy compromises and absorption?

It's been mentioned, briefly, that about the entry of Jainas into south, and Tamiḻakam and in general scholars believe that the migration happened from Magadha to Karnataka and thence to Tamil Nadu, though few believe they came from Andhra, or even Bengal or Orissa. The only difference of opinion that exists regard the date of earliest Jaina occupation and some scholars opine that it's possible that 'nigantha' (nirgrantha' as the Jainas were termed, before the schism happened) Jaina monks might have come here even before the legendary śrutakevalin of Magadha, Bhadrabāhu, moved in a mass exodus to the Karnataka region. It may be mentioned that it is this traditional account (recorded in inscriptions of 600 AD and not earlier, of Sravanabelagola, Karnataka) which gained currency among the people in Tamiḻakam, as is seen from the reference to this even in the Periya Purāṇam (of Cēkkiḻār, the Śaiva bard) to a host of 'Karnataka Jaina' "pouring into Madurai like a cloud burst, uprooting the ruling dynasty..."[12]

The historiography of Tamil Jainism has largely been history of the numerous epigraphical evidences available (most if them published), the iconography of the Jaina monuments, literary traditions of the Jainas in Tamil, each subject being largely a distinct one, disjointed, almost but most of it being used as evidence for the formula of 'glory', 'decline', 'revival', etc. And, despite the abundance of material available as to the area occupied by Jainas, donations of land, the 'Paḷḷiccandam' lands, monastic institutions, etc, there has as yet been no effort on tracing the historical geography of Jainas/Jainism; or movement of the Jaina /monks and nuns in Tamiḻakam. One's idea of the 'marginal' and 'mainstream' is set against this concept of

[12] As noted by K.R.Venkatarama Ayyar, 'South Indian Jainism' (reprint edition of Transactions of the Archaeological Society of South India, 1957 – 58), p.25.

historical geography – settlement of newer areas, villages, agricultural land and of the Jaina community' as the chapter on inscriptions would bring to focus.

Again, while a wealth of information and analysis exists for the sudden increase in brahmadeya grants and settlement of agrahāras by the state, there is as yet a very sketchy descriptive account of the paḷḷiccandam lands. It must be noted that these grants were being made around the same time as the brahmadeyas and devadānas with similar exemptions on similar kinds of taxes and exclusive ownership rights. However, most historians have concentrated on the brahmadeyas as the main/only focus of discussion on ideology and polity, or, as B.D. Chattopadhyaya [13] would put it, about brahmadeyas and devadānas being a "socio-religious necessity for the temporal power", in a brilliant hypotheses on the need to review the "feudal" state structure in view of the evidence from land grants given by the state not necessarily meaning a breakdown of the centralized state structure. Thus, the expansion of brāhmaṇa settlements – with donations from the state only gave legitimacy to the state, as the brahmadeyas, in the larger context of ascendancy of the 'bhakti' ideology, meant an integration of cults, sacred centers, and a universal Purāṇic idiom.[14]

However, it may have been enlightening to place the 'paḷḷicçandam' concept within this larger scheme to look at the popularity the Jina doctrine now commanded. Particularly, what were the relations between the paḷḷicandam, (and the members in charge of these) and the

[13] B.D. Chattopadhyaya, 'Political Processes and Structures of Polity early Medieval India: Problems of Perspective', Presidential Address, Indian Historical Congress, 1983, Burdwan

[14] Ibid, p.8

brahmadeyas - where are the paḷḷiccandam lands located? The spatial distribution of paḷḷiccandam lands has not been so far studied despite a wealth of evidence. Instead, though contested, Kennedy[15] talks at length of the ideal of Brāhmiṇ as "renouncer", to whom the king "refers" to for "legitimacy", and the Tamil concept of kingship, for him, becomes the concept of ritual submission to the idea of the Brāhmiṇ as supreme renouncer. The only mention of Jainas and the Buddhists is limited to the reference to their famous epics, the Ciḷappatikāram and Maṇimekalai, which refer to Jaina merchant families. The whole period of Jaina influence over the ruling dynasties is ignored and it may be anybody's question as to what was the ideal of kingship being referred to in this period? Moreover, the Jaina monks were themselves seen as renouncers in a stricter sense than the brāhmaṇas. At this juncture, where one is only beginning to consider the necessity of understanding paḷḷiccandam and brahmadeya in a larger context of contestation one might refer back to Dirks when he says that "political systems in south India played a strong role in providing opportunities and <u>structures</u> for cooperative alliances among discrete social groups."[16] While of course he is talking of the alliances of the Pallavas with warring groups of chieftains, one might here borrow the idea of structures of integration in our case brahmadeyas, paḷḷiccandam being two such.

It is interesting to note that paḷḷiccandam seems to be the closest replicate of the brahmadeya, and the Jainas, not the Buddhists, managed to evince such a concession from the royalty. One of the reasons for this may be seen in the

[15] Richard Kennedy, 'The king in Early South India as Chieftain and Emperor", <u>Indian Historical Review</u>, III, No. 1, 1977 (pp.1-15); p.1.
[16] Nicholas Dirks, 'Political Authority and Structural Change in Early South Indian History', <u>Indian Economic and Social History Review</u>, 13, no. 2, p.131. Emphasis added

changes affected in Jainism, in its interaction with the Tamil cultural idiom, the tribes, the milieu, and perhaps, as Champakalakshmi believes, "Jainism became as much part of Purāṇic religion and temple cult as the brāhmaṇical Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism were." [17] At a popular level, simultaneously, "it induced messianic expectations among the lower order... through the ideal of salvation." [18] However, despite seeming similarity in terms of rituals, worship of minor deities, etc. there was as yet a debate among Jainas themselves regarding the practices some of them considered alien and polluting to the cause of the Jina's religion.

The Jainas, who were in Tamiḻakam during what is termed the age of the anthologies, or 'Cañkam' period, were gradually affecting a change in the ideals of the society, or certainly the ideals expressed in the anthologies. Much has been said about the two most 'visible' ideals symbolised (eulogised) in the poems - the 'love' and 'war' aspects. The age of heroism has been much talked of. At the same time, towards the latter half of this age , the influence of Jainism as well as Buddhism was felt in the Cañkam corpus - "... gnomic and didactic literature was produced by the essentially <u>philosophical</u> (emphasis mine) poets of the day...the earliest works were interpreted from a moral standpoint and the bards were 'canonised' as the wise and noble men ... ('cāṉṟor ceyyuḷ' - or 'poetry of the noble men'). .... There was a shift from heroes of poems to their authors." [19]

Talking of the general neglect of the Jaina 'schemata' in reconstructing the history of Tamiḻakam) one would digress

[17] R Champakalakshmi, 'Urbanisation in South India: Role of Ideology and Polity' 47th Presidential Address at the IHC, Srinagar, 1986, p.34
[18] Ibid,p.34
[19] K. Kailasapathy, <u>Tamil Heroic Poetry</u>, O.U.P., Delhi, 1968, p.230.

to mention a point about the Jaina Purāṇic tradition, which differs from the brāhmaṇical in giving importance to the authorial aspect. The genesis of the text (its creation, reasons for its creation, contexts, et al) is of prime consideration in Jaina tradition. One is reminded of a particular exegesis – which is reflective of the generalisation which much scholarship suffers from, in terminology, categories, etc. - of course in a totally different context. This was a paper on the construction of the Krishna figure in one of Bankim Chandra's works, Krishna Caritra. The generalisation occurs in the category 'Indian' tradition, Kaviraj, at one point, says in the '<u>Indian</u>' tradition, the text not only hides the individual, it erases him....; the author is not the text's creator, but its instrument ..."[20]

Further, he talks of the "mistrust" which is the phenomenon peculiar to this "Indian tradition". Though the above mentioned paper speaks of a different subject, for a different period, the general understanding of an 'Indian' over and above the numerous local traditions or concepts can be compared with even the brilliant monographs produced on agrarian history, land grants, on brāhmaṇical rise (and overpowering) over other belief systems; the concern with brahminisation has somewhere managed to produce limited understanding of the processes of interaction between the so-termed 'heretical' sects and people. Though enormous scholarship has emerged around the Jainas in Tamil Nadu, it has by far concentrated on detailed documentation of epigraphs, literature and monuments and missed out on an analytical understanding of community through centuries.

[20] Sudipto Kaviraj, 'The Myth of Praxis: The Construction Of the Figure of Krishna in Krishna. Charitra', <u>Occasional Papers on History and Society,</u> No.L p. 7-8. Emphasis added.

In recent years, there have emerged monographs bordering on this very aspect. However, community history of the Jainas in Gujarat, Rajasthan, etc. has had a greater scholarly contribution and attention. In this context, one hopes that this, one's thesis - might introduce this much neglected aspect of the Tamil Jaina community and its history in the context of broader historical changes in Tamiḻakam. Again, one may reiterate that by Tamil Jaina, one is insisting on their identity as Tamil (which they state with pride) and as Jaina; and in this sense, differentiating them from Jainas settled in Tamilnadu – mostly the Śvetāmbara ("Marwari", "seṭh" as the Tamil Jainas refer to them) Jainas who are basically traders migrated in later periods into Tamilnadu. The linguistic identity, one will see, is very important to the Tamil Jainas' own construction of a community identity; and it goes on to establish a regional tradition within a pan-Indian, pan-Jaina community construct.

The Missing Tamil Jainas: Some Perspectives on the Jaina Community history

Paul Dundas[21] gives a detailed descriptive account of the Svetambara and Digambara Jainas based on their respective textual traditions. However, this is not an analytical monograph on the Jainas meant for the specialist but it certainly gives the 'outsider' (to the realm of Jainism) an overall picture of the Jaina philosophy, organisation, and the essential difference between the Śvetāmbara and Digambara Jainas in one composite text.

[21] Dundas, Paul, The Jains (John Hinnells, Ninian Smart, eds, Library of Religious Beliefs and Practices Series), Routledge, London, 1992

Talking of the Jaina perceptions of history (*itihāsa*), J.P.Jain[22] gives the views of the Jaina teacher; Jinasenā (9th century AD) defines history as an account of past happenings, which must be truthful, righteous, authoritative.' He then gives an account of the early Oriental scholars on Jaina studies and contests (as we have said earlier) their idea that Jainism has a single unified textual tradition, and stresses on the importance of local interpretations. He refers to a wealth of literature (traditional) on Jaina modes of worship and rites of veneration.

According to Burton Stein[23] one of the main ideas behind royal patronage to Jainism lay in its 'non-peasant' warrior power, for legitimacy, and gave an 'Āryan respectability' to the benevolence of the ruler.[24] Stein further posits the Jaina kingship as a moral (model of) kingship as against the 'heroic' kingship of early Tamils. However, it is difficult to come to this conclusion unless one studies in depth the kingship and ideology over the period when Jainism was in an important position vis-à-vis the state. Moreover, one could really talk of Jaina kingship (or symbols of kingship/power) as to have hegemony over other systems.

In the context of the Jaina Purāṇas, John Cort [25] The universal history comprises the biography on the 23 tīrthaṅkaras, the Baladevas, Vāsudevas, Prativāsudevas (9 each) and the Śalākāpuruṣas, while the local history comprises of the lineage texts (paṭṭāvalis) or lists of Jaina

[22] J.P. Jain, The Jaina Sources of the History of Ancient India (100 BC to AD 900), Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi, 1964, p.1

[23] Burton Stein, Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India, OUP, Delhi, 1985

[24] Ibid, p. 79 – 80

[25] John E. Cort, 'Genres of Jain History', Journal of Indian Philosophy, 23, No. 1, 1986

monks or teachers, and believes that writing a history of the Jaina community must involve a separate study of each of theses histories, in their contexts. Elsewhere, Cort distinguishes between the 'Hindu" purāṇas – which are "preoccupied with activities of gods and goddesses on an often transcendental level", while the Jaina Purāṇas deal with lives of "specific" people who "lived at specific times in Jaina history".[26] However, here it does not distinguish between the 'universal' or 'local' Jaina history; and it is well known that what is termed 'universal' history also talks of people (the Baladevas, Vāsudevas, etc.) not necessarily of "this world", so to say; and the Jaina time (for the tirthankaras before Pārṣva and Mahāvīra) is also an exaggerated time measured in units of 'oceans'. Though pilgrimage is important to both Jaina and Brāhmaṇical traditions, Cort believed that the Jaina Purāṇas are "less inclusive"[27] than their brāhmiṇical counterparts' and did not absorb ritual cultic and sectarian texts as did Hindu Purāṇas."[28]

Talking of 'inclusion' of the 'popular' at a different level, Padmanabh S, Jaini argues that the Jaina even like the Theravada Buddhists "were unable to prevent their laity from falling prey to theses (popular / non-Jaina) customs."[29] And in fact "a 10th century text of Somadeva, the Upāsakādhyāyana (epilogue to a larger work, a religious, novel Yaśastilakacampu prescribed practices for Digambara Jaina laity) included almost all the rituals of the

[26] John Cort, 'An Overview of the Jaina Puranas', in Wendy Doniger, ed., Purāṇa Perennis, SUNY, Albany, New York, 1993. (pp.185 – 206); p. 186-7

[27] Ibid, p.187

[28] Ibid. p. 187

[29] Padmanabh, S. Jaini, 'Is there Popular Jainism?" in Michael. Carrithers, Caroline Humphrey, eds., Assembly of Listeners: Jainas in Society, Cambridge, 1991, p.189

Hindus."[30]However, a number of Jaina monks and acaryas, at the same time, were questioning this development and also making efforts to stem this tide. Thus, Jaini refers to Jinasenā's (8th century AD) Ādipurāṇa (containing a list of, among other aspects of the 'universal' history, householder rites) wherein he talks of removing the images of 'false gods' or mithyā devata from their residence.[31] Thereby, Jaini avers that the time of Jinasenā saw a "movement to re-convert" the Jainas who "were prone to worship non-Jaina gods."[32] But despite efforts, even like Theravada Buddhism, Jainism also allowed a parallel, popular aspect to develop. "Both succumbed to strong popular demands for the worship of demigods, and had to finally legitimize some form of a cult of 'guardian deities' (the Yakṣa/Yakṣi)."[33]

While western scholarship in the recent past has give a lot of focus to the community aspect of Jainism, the community referred has been the Śvetāmbara Jainas of the north. Jainas of Gujarat and Rajasthan have been worked on intensively and extensively by these scholars, almost to the exclusion of Jaina communities in the south, particularly the community of Tamil Jainas in Tamilnadu. In many cases there is general ignorance of the existence of such a community as the Tamil Jainas in the first place. For instance, speaking generally about the Jaina community in a work that treats of the Jaina ritual culture, Lawrence Babb talks of a universal category of Jainas without situating them in the regional context, at least when talking of the Jaina ritual culture in his Ascetics and Kings in a Jaina Ritual Culture (1998).

[30] Ibid, p. 188-9.

[31] Ibid, p.194.

[32] Ibid, p.194
[33] Ibid, p.198

The Tamil Jainas: Community, Identity: the Issues

a. The Caste Question[34]

There appears to be a status quo in terms of caste equations so far as the Jainas vis-a-vis other castes are concerned. Although there is no place for caste in the 'pristine' Jaina religion, the story of the birth of occupational divisions as conceptualised in the story of Ṛṣabha, the first tirthankara, seems to be of later origin, basically addressing the inevitability of the caste factor in Indian society as a whole. [35] There seems an acceptance of caste, outside, if not within the Jaina system, in terms of general social relations.

Very little or nothing has been spoken about the concept of caste vis-à-vis the Tamil Jainas. It is believed since Jainism per se did not believe in caste and hierarchy, it may not be necessary to look at caste. Plus, the Tamil Jaina community as an intrinsically agrarian community, in Tamiḻakam within a larger agrarian and hierarchised context is sure to have been in some way or the other been very important in this larger context. The people who took to the Jaina faith were mostly the veḷḷāḷas. Though Sangave speaks of a sect of "Jain brāhmaṇas" it is not to be taken to mean literally the brāhmaṇs who were earlier converts to Jainism; he means the priestly caste. Plus, there is an attempt by him, and some

[34] This started off initially as a curiosity based question, which was posed to the community during my discussions with them. One had initially thought that the Jainas would be more 'liberal' on the question of caste. But one did, with time, notice the taboos practised in terms of entry to the temples restricted, and other taboos that they talked of regarding lower castes. I acknowledge the contribution to this question – essentially by consistent probing to my first expression of surprise at seeing caste 'at play' in the field - of P. Sainath, (fellow) journalist, friend.

[35] Mentioned elsewhere, the story of four occupational divisions devised by Rsabha, which were meant to be simply occupational divisions without corresponding hierarchical arithmetic which made it different from the Hindu understanding of caste and descent-based work. The Jaina castes did not have anything to with heredity and birth in a caste. Thus, there is nothing in the story that says an agriculturist's son cannot be anything else, or a trader's son cannot be anything but a trader, for instance. But the essence of divisions and occupational divisions in society has some semblance to the Hindu claims of caste being occupational divisions.

others who tended to follow that argument that it means brāhmaṇas. He takes the idea of 'brāhmaṇa' as being closely connected to the temple and ritualistic process and transposes it to the Jaina community, without differentiating. For, if anything, unlike the brāhmaṇas, the so –called Jaina brāhmaṇas", who are actually the arcakas in his case, are not considered the highest category among the Tamil Jainas. They depend to a large extent on the donations of the community to their religious establishments, the matha, the latter taking care of their needs, in most cases.

The veḷḷāḷas who took to Jainism did not leave their own caste identity behind. Caste then, was a firmly established social truth that remained, while the religious doctrine they adopted was far away from the regular caste hierarchy born from the Vedic religion. The Jainas have their own explanations and instances to this. Where they believe it is occupational – and Vṛṣabha first categorised occupational categories. And is not caste as "in the brāhmiṇ sense of caste'. Yet, it is there. The lower castes are not allowed in their temples. But the explanations are different. Not only lower castes, but anyone consuming meat, is considered polluting and not allowed into the Jain temples.

In discussions on caste in Tamilnadu, perhaps there is need to bring under closer scrutiny even the so called 'heretical' or 'heterodox' sects and understand how caste as a basic layer of their identity function in these communities. The Tamil Jainas retained – many of them – their caste / jāti identity such as Mutaliyar, Chettiar, and so forth. Such a closer scrutiny is missed for these non-brāhmiṇical religious communities and in a sense almost written off as non existent. One is trying to address this question in a

preliminary manner, for lack of adequate discussion on the subject so far as Tamil Jaina community is concerned

Caste, as Rajan Gurukkal remarks, was "the most potent discursive instrument that stablilised the relations of production... accommodating in its fold a variety of economically stratified functionaries of hereditary trades. As agrarian expansion advanced, human settlements (ūr) originally bound by kinship got integrated as agrarian localities (nāḍu) which subsequently acquired great political significance in the monarchical system." [36]

This being so, when it comes to the study of processes of change that affected the Jaina community, caste never seems to occur as a matter justifying any attention. So far as the Tamil Jaina agricultural community is concerned, in the present context, for those who could afford, lower castes generally work on their farms. Those who cannot afford costs of the agricultural labourers, of course do their own tilling. Lower castes are certainly not allowed into Jaina temples. While this may be one aspect of their caste relations, there are other aspects to it as well.

While one of the aspects that needs to be noted is the way the Jainas perceived themselves vis-à-vis the other castes (the lower castes) and the other aspect is the way they retained specific clan / jāti 'markers' with their Jaina identity. Both these aspects are reflected in the following points that Thurston notes about the Jainas in Tamilnadu.

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[36] Rajan Gurukkal, "Towards a New Discourse: Discursive Processes in Early South India", in R.Champakalakshmi and S. Gopal, eds, Tradition, Dissent and Ideology: Essays in Honour of Romila Thapar, OUP, Delhi, 1994 (pp.313 – 334); p.331

In this context Thurston's remarks on this aspect may be noted here – "The usual caste affix is Nainar, but a few, generally strangers from other districts, are called Rao, Chetti, Das or Mudaliyar."[37] Again, "The men use the title of Nayinar or Udaiyar, but their relations in Kumbakonam and elsewhere in that direction sometimes call themselves Chetti or Mudaliyar. The men...in general appearance resemble the Vellalas...The women dress like Vellalas and wear the same kind of tali...and other jewellery..." [38] However, these 'markers' were not all too visible in the census conducted in that time. Of the Madras Census Report, 1891, Thurston says, "Out of a total of 25, 716 Jains, as many as 22, 273 have returned both caste and sub division as Jaina. The remainder have returned 22 sub divisions of which some such as Digambara and Svetambara are sectarian rather than caste divisions, but others like Marvadi, Osval, Vellalas etc are distinct castes....Some Jains have returned well known castes such as their main castes, for we have Jain Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Goudas, Vellalas, too...

At the Madras Census 1901, 27, 431 Jains were returned. Though they are found in nearly every district of Madras Presidency, they occur in the largest number in the following – South Canara – 9, 582; North Arcot – 8, 128; South Arcot – 5, 896.."[39]

As to why they returned their surnames as "Jains" may be a question that needs to be posed to the manner in which the census officials posed that question to the community in the first place.

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[37] E.Thurston, Castes and Tribes of South India, Vol. II, Government Press, Madras, 1909; p. 427

[38] Ibid, p.431

[39] Ibid, p. 419-20

But in a sense it does reflect the community's need to identify themselves as "Jaina" first and foremost, as being distinct from the "Hindu" category of the British, considering that in this period there were also a number of cases coming up in legal matters wherein the Jainas were trying to get their status changed from 'Hindu' to 'Jain' [40] Thurston also remarks on the Jainas' social taboos. "The Jainas are careful to avoid pollution from contact with outcastes, who have to get out of their way in the road, as I have noticed myself."[41] "(There are) more than half of them in Wandiwash taluk and the rest in Arcot and Polur...They have most of the brahman ceremonies and wear the sacred thread, but look down upon brahmans as degenerate followers of an originally pure faith. For this reason they object generally to accepting ghee or jaggery etc from any but of their own caste. They are defiled by entering a Pariah village, and have to purify themselves by bathing and assuming a new thread..."[42] And he gives his opinion on the Jainas – "The Jain community now holds a high position in Tindivanam taluk and includes wealthy traders and some of quite the most intelligent agriculturists there."[43] Some of the perspectives of the Tamil Jaina community on these matters will be discussed later in this chapter.

In a land where 'lower' castes and the marginalised tribal population – hill tribes; in the context of animal sacrifices the caste (in this particular context, caste as a segregating ideology) question did matter. For Jainism to gain a strong

[40] This question is taken up later. Incidentally, the Supreme Court in 2005 declined minority status to Jains. And a 2006 SC judgment opined that the Jain religion is not part of the Hindu religion (Committee of Management Kanya Junior High Bal Vindya Mandir, Etah, U.P. v. Sachiv, U.P. Basic Shiksha Parishad, Allahabad, U.P. and Ors. Indian Supreme Court Case- http://www.judis.nic.in/supremecourt/)

[41] Thurston, op.cit, p. 426
[42] Ibid, p. 427
[43] Ibid, p.431

foothold - state patronage did help. On the other hand, brahminism and Sanskritic Hinduism seemed, at least on the face of it, more 'accepting' (?) of the local tribal / folk rituals and practices, despite the larger ideology of separation on the basis of concepts of purity and pollution and descent.

None of the works on Jainism in Tamiḻakam reflect on the caste question. Most work on an assumption, most often, that Jainism in Tamilnadu is above, and beyond caste. Were the Jainas really immune to segregation, caste inequalities? Did they remain aloof? Considering the long period of the survival of Tamil Jainas among a largely agricultural community, in the North, South Arcot, Tanjavur districts and parts of Ramanathapuram, Tamil Jainas, as a community, must surely have had to negotiate their space within the larger social parameters, caste being one such crucial and to a large extent an over whelming dimension. The stories of persecution that the Tamil Jainas narrate touch upon their understanding of the other castes and communities. Many a times, they do not seem to recount very favourable, and many happy sequences in their history within the Tamil country, which implies a consistent conflict of identities and existences.

A socio-cultural, anthropological account of the Tamil Jainas is necessary to tackle these questions, issues, as also to raise them from the perspective of a historian trying to reconstruct the history of a living community with an ancient past, rather than focus on state patronage via epigraphy alone, which tells only half the story.

So far as the Jainas were concerned, so far as some communities accepted the Jaina faith, it seemed fine, but

what was their response to those who stayed outside of it? In this sense, it seemed to be like any other 'elite' religious system, though, like Buddhism, initially it had started off as counter to the Vedic, brāhminical rigidity. However, it may be noted that the Jainas themselves affirm to a very different understanding of this 'exclusion'. The fact that anybody from any community, not strictly adhering to the tenets of Jainism about non killing (*koḷḷāmai*) most specifically, becomes 'impure' and polluting. They are known to have problems with brāhmiṇs – Thurston mentions this. "The Jainas are careful to avoid pollution from contact with outcastes, who have to get out of their way in the road, as I noticed myself....They have most of the brahman ceremonies and wear the sacred thread, but look down upon Brahmans as degenerate followers of an originally pure faith. For this reason they object generally to accepting ghee or jaggery, etc from any but those of their own caste. They are defiled by entering a Pariah village, and have to purify themselves by bathing and assuming a new sacred thread. The usual caste affix is Nainar, but a few, generally strangers from other districts, are called Rao, Chetti, Das, or Mudaliyar..."[44]

The Tamil Jainas also aver that the reason for their not allowing people from certain (lower) castes into their temples is qualitatively different from the reason adopted by the brāhmiṇs (according to them). It is not a question of treating them differently on the basis of birth, since their religious belief itself is based on karma and transforming of the individual self through observation of certain principles. They believe that their tīrthankara Ṛṣabha introduced occupation based categories strictly in terms of occupations,

[44] E. Thurston, Caste and Tribes of South India, Vol II, Government Press, Madras, 1909, pp.426-7.

not based on descent or hierarchy; and hence there is no question of exclusion, the kind practised within brāhmiṇism.

(The) "Credit for accommodating the Hindu caste system as a worldly institution goes to the ingenuity and literary skill of the acarya Jinasenā (c.800). Jinasenā's efforts to "jina-ise" certain pan Indian social norms were by no means confined to the issue of caste."[45] Interestingly, it has been noted that Jinasena was a brahmin convert to Jainism who along with his teacher Vīrasenā is credited with converting Amoghavarṣa the Rāshṭrakuṭa king to Jainism.[46]

But the Tamil Jainas would like to perceive of caste differently, and not as the way the Dharmaśāstras talk of it. For instance, T. S. Sripal, a Tamil Jaina scholar who wrote extensively on Jaina religion in Tamilnadu and on persecution of the Jainas, and was in the forefront o fall discussion on Tamil Jaina community identity and history (a Congress worker during the freedom struggle) says, "In Jaina tradition there are four occupational groups – aṟasar (ruler), antaṉar (learning), vaṇikar (merchant), veḷḷāḷar (agriculturists).."[47]

Padmanabh Jaini points out, "The caste of the kṣatriyas came to be established when Ṛṣabha assumed the powers of a king and held weapons in his arms. The vaiṣya and the sudra castes arose subsequently as he invented different means of

[45] Nathmal Tatia, translated and ed, Tattvartha Sutra: That Which Is, Umasvati / Umasvami, Pujyapada and Sidattasenagani, The Sacred Literature Series (ed by Kerry Brown and Sima Sharma), Harper Collins, San Fransisco, 1994; p.xxxviii

[46] John E. Cort, "An overview of the Jaina Purāṇas", in Wendy Doniger, ed, Purana Perennis, SUNY, Albany, 1993

[47] T. S. Sripal, Iḷaṅgovaṭikal Samayam Yātu? (Tamil), Parry Nilayam (Boradway), Madras, 1957;(p.39)

livelihood and people were trained in diverse arts and crafts." [48]

V.A. Sangave (who wrote on the Jaina social order) writes, "It has been very emphatically stated by Jain research scholars that the castes found in Jaina community at present appear to have come into existence after the 10th century AD because Jaina books prior to 10th century AD do not refer to castes." [49] But, "It is not definitely known how the various castes, sub castes have originated." [50] But then, certainly that the people who accepted the Jaina faith brought in their caste identities with them as they came – thus veḷḷāḷars – keep mutaliyār, kounder, etc, caste identity with Jaina identity.

On the caste question, Mallinatha Sastri says, "Brāhmiṇs, kṣatriyas and vaiśyas adopted Jainism. People of lower castes neither adopted this religion nor was it easy for them to do so, since Jainism was strict about the question of eating meat, adhering to ahimsa....Only the higher castes could adopt it....Lower caste people are used to drinking, eating meat, which was allowed in other religions. ....Jaina religion, thus, was only able to remain (secure) in the hands of a few...." [51]

It is difficult to agree with his point on the brāhmiṇs (not necessarily the kṣatriyas and vaiśyas) accepting the Jaina faith (or converting as it may). Difficult considering the fact that in that period, which favoured them – in social,

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[48] Padmanabh S. Jaini, Collected Papers on Jaina Studies, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 2000; p.340

[49] Vilas Adinath Sangave, Jaina Community: A Social Survey, Popular Prakashan, Mumbai, 1980 edition (first published in 1959); p.316

[50] Ibid, p.322

[51] Mallinatha Sastri, Tamilnadu kā Jain Itihās (Hindi), Kundakunda Bharati, New Delhi, 1994, p.133

economic and political terms – why would they have the need to adopt a 'heretical' faith, especially one (besides Buddhism) which had come out in the strongest terms against Vedic, brāhmiṇical ritualism. Moreover, in the Tamilnadu context, brāhmiṇs have been nearly always most vociferous in denouncing all other faiths. With Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava bhakti concept becoming more popular and accepted among the brāhmiṇs, there was open denouncing and persecution of the Jaina and Buddhists. Moreover, the Jaina tradition has always had an uncomfortable relationship with the brāhmiṇs or so it would seem in many of their textual traditions speaking of the brāhmiṇs in very low light.

In one of his essays Padmanabh Jaini refers to one of the Jaina textual traditions and its perception of the origin of brāhmiṇs as a social group. He is talking in the context of the Jaina ācārya Jinasenā's response to brāhmiṇical (Vedic) hegemony - "exploiting fully the rich potentialities in the legend of Ṛṣabha, the first sarvajna (omniscient one) Jinasenā sought, as it were, to write new history of the world, presided over by a Jain Brahmā, who pronounced a set of Jain Vedas, instituted a Jain division of the castes and duties, and proclaimed a series of Jain saṁskāras, complete with Jain rites and litany......."[52]

At the same time, he points out that Jinasenā believed, "there is only one jati called the manuṣyajāti or the human caste, but divisions arise on account of their different professions."[53]

Thus - *"manuṣyajātir ekaiva jātinamōdayōdbhava*

[52] Padmanabh Jaini (2000), cf. cit, pp. 339-40

[53] Ibid, pp.339-40

vṛttibhedahitād bhedac caturvidhyām ihasnute."[54]

And "Jinasenā claims that the Vedas are not what the Brāhmaṇs chant at the slaughter of the sacrificial animals, but the Dvādaśāṅgapravacana or the scripture of the Jains, pronounced by the Ādideva...." [55] Through his Ādipurāṇa, thus, "Jinasenā not only criticised the Brāhmaṇical doctrine of the creator and his creation (Īśvarakartṛtvavāda) but openly challenged the authority of the Vedic scriptures, rejected the divinity of the Vedic gods, repudiated the efficacy of the Brāhmaṇical rites and rituals, and above all ridiculed the claim of the Brāhmaṇs to a superior social rank...." [56]

Coming to the story of the origin of the terminology (or by extension, the group) 'brāhmaṇas' Jaini writes – "The Jain accounts unanimously declare that the caste of the Brāhmaṇs was not instituted by Ṛṣabha but by his son Bharata, the first cakravartin... Jinasenā ignores the word brāhmaṇa and concentrates on the term dvija which afford him a chance to describe in great detail the corpus of 98 saṁskāras (sanctifying ceremonies which, called the upanīti (initiation) conferred upon an ordinary man the status of a 'twice-born'" [57] "The Prakrit commentaries on the Āvaśyaka (Āvaskyaka-cūrṇi and Āvaśyaka-Maladhāri-vṛtti quoted in Devendra's Ṛṣabhadeva; also in Triṣaṣṭiśalākāpuruṣacarita I) take recourse to a folk etymology to explain the origin of the word mahana (Sanskrit brāhmaṇa). It is said that Bharata on his return from his from his world conquest wished to share his wealth with his brothers who had already become

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[54] Ibid, p.348: note.47 from Adipurana, XXXVIII, 45

[55] Ibid, pp.339-40
[56] Ibid, pp.339-40
[57] Ibid, p.341-2

ascetics in the monastic order of Ṛṣabha. Bharata approached them with a cart load of food and other gifts, but was grieved to hear that Jain ascetics could not partake of food specially prepared for them (uddiṣṭa-āhāratyāga). Since it is wrong for householders to receive alms thus freely given Indra the king of gods suggested to Bharata that the food might be offered to the virtuous initiates who had taken the aṇuvratas of a householder. Bharata gratefully fed them and invited them to have their meals for ever at his place. Henceforth they were to forsake other means of livelihood which involved hiṁsā (tilling, etc) and engage themselves in activities like the study and teaching of the scriptures, worship of the Jina, etc. They kept vigil on the king's conduct by reminding him 'you are conquered (by the passions); fear increases, therefore do not kill, do not kill (*mā hana*). They thus came to be called the māhana or the Brāhmaṇs."[58] "In recognition of their new status (varṇalābha) he conferred upon them the title of dvija and confirmed it by investing them with sacred threads (yajñōpavita) which indicated the number of pratimās they had assumed. .."[59]

In fact, the blatant conflict between these systems has been recorded and often mentioned in works of many scholars. This being so, the Jaina community's response to this conflict has not been adequately addressed. In subtle ways, Mayilai Sini Venkataswamy in his book Śamaṇamum Tamiḻum[60] does not mince words in expressing his opinion that the sole cause of the decline in the popularity of Jainism in Tamiḻakam was the rise of 'Hinduism' through the

[58] Ibid, p.341
[59] Ibid, p.342
[60] Mayilai Siini Venkataswamy, Śamaṇamum Tamiḻum (in Tamil), South India Saiva Siddhanta Publications, Tinnevelly, 1954. I thank my mother for having spent time in writing, and later reading this text with me; and Theodore Bhaskaran for sparing his old copy of the book when it could not be found elsewhere.

'bhakti' movement.[61] He also notes that – as per the Jaina tradition – the Jaina teacher Akalaṅka defeated a Buddhist bhikku in the Kancipuram temple (now the Kāmākṣi temple, though claimed by both Buddhists and Jainas as theirs formerly) the Buddhist lost and moved to Sri Lanka[62]. And he also reasons that Vedic religion incorporated the pre-existing Dravidian gods and goddesses of the Tamil people such as Murukaṉ, Koṟṟavai, Tirumāl, Śiva, into its fold. So while Vedic religion, Jainism and Buddhism all entered the Dravidian land and culture and society, and were not endemic to that context, Vedic religion incorporated the Dravidian ritual context, including that of animal sacrifice, etc, while the other two did not.[63] Dravidian gods and goddesses thus became bound to Vedic gods and goddesses through relationships constructed between the two – as daughters, sons, consorts, and so forth.[64]

Elsewhere Venkataswamy also mentions that, at the same time, festivals such as Dīpāvali, Śivarātri, etc were essentially Jaina festivals which were incorporated in the Hindu religion.[65] This last point was also something the Tamil Jainas one met invariably spoke of. One will revert back to this last point while talking about the way the Tamil Jaina community speaks of its identity.

b. The Persecution Question

Memories of persecution are still strong: a casual walk with an elderly Tamil Jaina from a bus stop to a home at Triupparambur, barely a kilometer long walk and the first

[61] Ibid, p.57
[62] Ibid, p.57
[63] Ibid, p.58
[64] Ibid, p.59
[65] Ibid, p.79ff; for the Tamil Jainas, Dīpāvali symbolises the enlightenment of Mahāvīra, while Śivarātri that of Ṛṣabha.

thing he says after initial introductions, is the story of Sundara Pāṇḍya. The king was a Jaina initially. He had a headache and his sister a Śaiva. The Jaina guru could not cure the king. But Appar, who was brought in by his sister, cured him. The king converted to Śaivism. This story gets retold in many versions in many of the villages one visits. Many others narrate accounts of the persecution – impaling of the Jain muṇis, kaḻuveṟṟatu and the viḻā (festival) celebrating the same at Madurai even now.

The story that seems to be uppermost on the minds of the Tamil Jainas regarding persecution is that of the "cakkiḷi rājā". Now the term cakkiḷi refers to the caste of leather workers / tanners. Interestingly in all the accounts of the story the term used by the community for the king (we shall go to that story shortly) is 'cakkiḷi' but that is not the term mentioned in any of the written records of the story. 'Cakkiḷi' in that sense, may be used more as a generic category for a person of the lower caste. Not necessarily to a person of the cakkiḷi caste. In some cases some members of the community used the term 'oṟu Cenji rājā'; or 'ciṟṟaṟasaṉ' (a small king of Cenji), and so on.

The Jaina community has a larger contact with a pan Indian Jaina community today only in terms of donations for āśramas, establishments and so on. But at the same time the Tamil identity is also important. The language is important to theiṟ construction of a Jaina identity as well. A very literate society, largely. In terms of how they perceive themselves the immediate response is – non killing (koḷḷāmai aṭi piṭikiṟatu) to hold strongly to the ideal of non killing, ahimsai, koḷḷāmai, non violence.

It is important to trace changes and development, ruptures and breaks within the processes that helped evolve a Tamil Jaina community within the socio-political and economic changes in Tamilakam. There can not be a linear account.

Around 15-20 years ago a monk from the north, Ārjivasāgar took strong exception to Tamil Jainas worshipping yaksis as mother goddesses and condemned this aspect throughout his tour of Tamilnadu. Quite a section of the populace was influenced and inspired by his speeches and till date there are few Tamil Jainas who agree with his view point. But most do still invoke the yakṣa and yakṣi – or śāsana deivatai. Women especially seem to share an intimate relationship with the yaksi images in the temples. Tīrthaṅkaras, being omniscient beings and with no direct contact with the 'this-worldly' aspects of laypersons, they are not to be propitiated for granting boons, and so forth. Though ostensibly even the sasana devatas are not propitiated for boons, many women say they can relate better to these guardian deities who have the capacity to intervene in the everyday lives by extending help to the lay devotee in times of need. In this one can see the sensual bhakti element operating at some levels. Women perform pūjai – offer worship – to the yakṣi images in shrines on certain days of the month or on specific days. Litanies are available to them in Tamil with such concepts as 'lakṣārcanai', 'aṣṭōttiram', 'tōttira mañcari', and so forth, almost similar to the brāhminical devi worship. Many of the yakṣis, incidentally, share names with the mother goddess in the Dēvi Māhātmyam or with Śaṅkara's Soundarya Lahari, for instance. Though the Jainas would have one believe the brāhminical goddesses (or local goddesses incorporated in the overarching temple religious complex of the brāhmins) was inspired by the Jaina yakṣis. Padmāvati, Dharumadevi / Kūṣmāṇḍini are among the

most popular yakṣis. Some elements of Śākta worship are also visible in some cases. In this case, perhaps one must look at the Tamil Jaina ritualistic evolution within the larger Tamil socio-cultural context. Operating with specific Tamil idioms. Where the worship of mother goddesses predates the evolution of the temple – brāhminical ritual complex. Goddesses such as Koṟṟavai are known in the early Cañkam period; so also other local village, forest dwelling mother goddesses. In that sense, both the Purāṇic and Jaina and Buddhist religions incorporated an earlier existing idiom of goddess worship, which may have been a sensual form of worship. There were of course the 'moving' god –concept related to divination rituals where the goddess or god possessed the person that worshipped, evoked her / him. Bhakti it self took from this basic Tamil layer to later become quite a different concept from the one it originally started off as (idealising a 'personal' god-head)

c. *The Identity Question*

The Dravidian movement (Self respect) and Tamil identity also helped the Tamil Jainas in that period to assert their identity as a community and claim its due place in the Tamil literary and cultural realm. The question of Tamilness was being raised – language becoming the central focus – also protesting against Brāhmiṇs and Sanskrit at the same time. People such as Tiru. Vi. Kalyanasundaram Mudaliyar (1883-1953), also called Tiru. Vi. Ka, E. V. Ramaswamy Periyar empathised with the Jainas on questions of their contribution to Tamil literature and their identity as a distinct community in Tamil Nadu with a rich history. In earlier periods, the scholar U.Ve. Swaminatha Aiyer made his own contribution to bringing to light several manuscripts relating to Jaina textual tradition, besides others.

If the veḷḷāḷars (originally) accepted the Jaina faith it might be interesting to relocate Stein's hypothesis on the brāhmiṇ-veḷḷāḷa alliance in the context of the segmentary state in south India. Especially considering the Śaiva (and brāhmiṇ) veḷḷāḷa conflict in the stories on many Jaina veḷḷāḷas converting to the Śaiva tradition post bhakti and later.

Even in the context of agrarian expansion there is seen a general silence on the question of the Jaina peasantry / agriculturists in Tamiḻakam. If one were to contextualise the 'nīr-pūci veḷḷāḷar' story that the Jainas narrate within the agrarian expansion context, one would say that the context of bhakti and extension of land to the brāhmiṇs had its own role to play in the conversion which may not necessarily have been religious. It was the need of the hour for some of the veḷḷāḷars to convert to also align with the bhakti and Śaiva tradition in order to receive royal patronage which was surely tilted against Jainas and Buddhists of the time, if not totally, at least to a large extent. The areas settled by the Śaiva veḷḷāḷars (which is the term they refer to themselves with, while the Jainas call them nīr pūci naiṉār) till date have a small number of Jaina families settled there, or these villages have been Jaina settlements in the past as is evident form the inscriptional records and existence of old Jaina temples or vestiges of Jaina tradition in the past. It may also be mentioned that in these villages, people refer to the visit of Appar in his proselytising mission (while the Śaiva veḷḷāḷars express it to highlight the importance of the visits as something 'divine', the Jainas refer to it as their nemesis).

Stein remarks that "The Choḷa period is the necessary starting place for any longitudinal interest in the agrarian

system of the Tamil plain and its extensions into the interior upland of modern Salem, Coimbatore, portions of the Arcots, and major portions of the Karnataka plateau and the Andhra plain. From the 9th to the 12th centuries, the foundation of a system of agrarian organisation was established which appears to have endured through most of the subsequent career of the agrarian order to the 19th century."[66] And that "The interaction of Brāhmaṇs and localised peasant folk constituted the primary cultural nexus of medieval South Indian peasant society."[67]

There is a need to place the history of the Tamil Jainas in a larger context of agrarianism / agrarian relations. While one did not start off with this premise in this study, it became clearer that at some point one needs to address the context of peasant society and agrarian relations in relation to the Tamil Jainas, a large section of who are agriculturists. A deeper study of agrarian settlements vis-à-vis the Tamil Jainas might be worthwhile.

The Tamil Jainas writing their own history

Among the Tamil Jainas writing their own history or the history of Jainism in Tamilnadu – like A. Chakravarti, "Jeevabandhu' T.S. Sripal, among others – they write primarily of their literature, with references to inscriptional records highlighting a past that was glorious for the Jainas in Tamilnadu; as well as of the persecution at different points in time when things changed. It is important to see the close association they feel to their literature, which is Tamil literature (or Jaina Tamil literature). The need to

[66] Burton Stein, Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India, OUP, Delhi, 1985 (paperback edition); p.4

[67] Ibid, p.4

reaffirm the contribution of Jainas to Tamil language and literature is perceptible in most of these efforts which shows a close link between the language – Tamil – and the identity of the Jainas as partakers of a great Tamil heritage. Especially a heritage constructed of the written word. They are found mostly asserting claims, or 're-claiming' from the votaries of other faiths (most essentially the Śaiva) the vast corpus of Tamil literature. Tamil language, need to reclaim the intrinsic relationship of the Jainas with Tamil, is a very important 'identity marker' for the Tamil Jainas in asserting their place in Tamil history, and contemporary Tamil cultural complex. These claims (to Tamil language and literature, being an essential part of the reclaiming) signify what may be called 'sites' of identity thus constructed - hardly the sacred centers of the Jainas, in the north (tīrthaṅkaras attained nirvāṇa, nearly all in the 'vaṭanāṭu', north).

On the notions / construct of the 'north' and 'south' India, S. Raju problematises the construct in historiography. He says, "'South' – south of the Vindhyas – as a historiographical unit was born in the limelight of the general histories of India..."[68]

Referring to Nilakanta Sastri's statement that the south figures in a very small way in the general history of India, he says, "in the statement the presence of an already historicised India directly influences the formulation of the South as a unity for historiography (and thereby, seen as getting 'secondary place' as it were)...The distancing of south India from 'north' of the Vindhyas involves the application of the model of relationship between 'part'

[68] S. Raju, "We and You in Devising India and South India", in Lateral Studies, No. 1, School of Social Sciences, M.G. University, Kottayam, year not mentioned; p.25

(self) and the 'rest of it' (other) in the total..."[69] But he is talking of contemporary history writing. Whereas the Jainas – in both contemporary terms and in the historical past - seem to always have the reference point of a 'north', perhaps nowhere as startlingly evoked as in what they consider auspicious, the 'vaṭakkiṟuttal', the term used for sallēkhana, death by starvation. The association of looking northwards to attain salvation has to do with their historical and mythological tīrthankaras attaining salvation (nirvāṇa) in the country above the Vindhyas. But what Raju talks about in historiographical terms may be extended to the understanding among general history writing in terms of the distance between 'perceived totality' (of Jainas / Jain-ism in Tamilnadu being just an extension of the studies in Jainism elsewhere in India) versus Tamil Jainas, the agricultural community one is talking about which is seeking affirmative status as a "minority", "backward" class. However, strangely enough, the north is not a perpetual invocation when it comes to establishing their identity. Especially so in the case of the Tamil Jainas who always mention the fact of their relationship with Tamil and Tamil literature. In this sense, there is the local, regional Jaina (Tamil) history that they see themselves as part of – and which also becomes their site of contestation and struggle to establish and maintain their identity – rather than a larger pan-Jaina, pan-Indian Jaina history. The latter is limited to the idea of taking part in the 'larger' Jaina pilgrimage realm, the common Jaina, or Digambara Jaina sacred tradition. So, these sacred centers, places where the tīrthankaras are believed to have attained their respective nirvāṇas, are parts of a ritual pilgrimage complex they are obliged to participate in. It is important to note here that the Tamil

[69] Ibid, p.25

Jainas relate to, and associate with, pilgrimages in multiple layers / at multiple levels - within the larger pan-Indian / pan-Jaina sacred geography of the Digambara tradition, or the larger Jaina tradition; and a local sacred geography in Tamilnadu, where local acaryas of this world have paid visits, whose footprint impressions are paid obeisance to.

The location of the Tamil Jaina 'secular' or temporal history is in the villages, and hilly terrains in rock-cut caves and natural caverns across Tamiḻakam, as much as it is in their act of claiming (usually historically valid, justifiably so) authorship of Tamil texts and language.

In connection with the Tamil language, it must be noted that the Tamil Jainas have an interesting metaphorical association for the Brāhmi script. According to them Brāhmi was the daughter of Ṛṣabha, the first tīrthaṅkara, also called Ādinātha. This tradition credits the Jainas with the origin of education and the written word or literacy. Incidentally in Tamilnadu, there are more temples to Ādi-tīrthaṅkara (as he is also referred to) and Pārśvanātha than to others (following Nēminātha and Mahāvīra, the latter being credited with the fewest temples).

In terms of writing of history in Tamilnadu, while the relationship between the brāhmiṇs / later brāhmiṇism and the ruling dynasties/ classes has been sufficiently, extensively theorised by numerous scholars and excellently so, one does not find a corresponding volume or intensity of research (in terms of variety of theoretical perspectives, rather than numbers of books on 'history of Jainism in Tamilnadu' to put it simply) on the Jaina community and the ruling elite.

This, despite the large volume of records available in terms of grants, paḷḷiccantam grants, land grants, and evolution of an obviously landed Tamil Jaina vellalar class in the rural areas. While it is not also one's own aim to look at these records with theoretical examination of such a relationship (since one starts with a critique of writing history of a surviving historical community, now marginalised, through measures of dynastic patronage, though the chapter on inscriptions does touch on some of these aspects differently) it would nevertheless be an interesting exercise to know as to what was the role the Jainas played (if they did) through acaryas or leaders in the Tamil political ideology.

In Karnataka, is it is known that Simhanandi the Digambara ācārya of the Nandi gaṇa, was instrumental in setting up the Gañga king Mādhava Koñguvarmaṉ in 265 AD, and thereby a dynasty that ruled Karnataka over centuries and also patronised the Jaina religion. It is a different matter however, that in later periods the Jainas fell in the eyes of the royalty and suffered persecution at the hands of the Vīraśaivas, who by then had established their close links with royalty.

As a landed class, what kind of a status did the Jainas build for themselves which might have been perceived as (if it was) qualitatively different from the brāhmiṇs and non Jaina landed veḷḷāḷas? These aspects of the Jaina community on the context of social relations have never been focussed and the story of 'rise' and 'decline' – via favours of the ruling elite becomes the only story of the 'perceived totality' (as one mentioned before) of the Jaina community in Tamiḻakam.

In the case of the Tamil Jainas the community, as well as its history, had to contend with Vedic Hinduism as a 'larger'

entity, at the pan-Jaina level; and brāhmiṇism and Śaiva-Vaiṣṇava (more often the former) religions within Tamiḻakam. There was a need to 'start' from a new, alternative ground to break hegemonies, not only for the Tamil Jainas (or Jainas in Tamiḻakam) but also for oneself to reconstruct, or try to reconstruct the past, recognising the historical 'truth' that through linking up of ideology and power, brāhmiṇism tried to uproot plurality, in the name of 'incorporating' the local; and reached a stage where it became the overwhelming, or dominant location of power. It is important to seek histories of a community thus victimised (with records of persecution available to the historian) through its own perceptions of and perspectives on the past – its own past, and a general past in which it locates itself. As it is important, at the same time, to "re-examine the interiority[70] of historical texts and theoretical dynamics of the taken-for-granted <u>unities</u> with which we go on to understand past and visualise future."[71]

Speaking of the community's perspectives on its past, one will take up for detailed discussion the Kuṟaḷ[72] – Tirukkuṟaḷ – and the contestation for symbols of a universal didactic Tamil text (in the sense of it being a text of universal human , secular aspirations) and appropriations thereof which has been written about by the Tamil Jainas themselves and a few scholars. In the 19th and early 20th century, the Kuṟaḷ becomes an important subject of debate and of claims on its authorship. Until very recently, debates have centered

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[70] S. Raju, cf. cit, p. 34. One reads the term to mean subjectivity, in its broadest sense, for one's purposes.

[71] Ibid, p. 34; emphasis mine.

[72] I owe the Tamil Jainas of each village I visited this, my understanding of the Kuṟaḷ; in fact every where I went, the authorship of Kuṟaḷ came up for discussion, giving me a whole direction to the way the Tamil Jaina community perceives itself, and Kuṟaḷ, one realised, or the debate and discourse on Kuṟaḷ -and Vaḷḷuvar / Eḷācārya / Kuntakuntācārya - with further reading, is a very important source to understanding this perception.

on the author's 'low-caste' origins. Stuart Blackburn, in a paper [73] He begins by saying "Clearly for Tamils the Kuṟaḷ was a contentious classic – it has received more commentaries (ten) than any other Tamil text – but it also became important for European missionaries and British civil servants as well, who were comforted by its non – idolatrous teachings and translated it many times. It was also the first book printed from the College of Fort St. George and it was later prescribed for primary, secondary and higher education..." [74]

It is a question of perspective, however, that for his analysis on Kuṟaḷ's authorship Blackburn uses the version of Vaḷḷuvamālai edited by the Śaivite Arumuka Nāvalar, and no other editions. The reading, thus, is bound to be problematic. He does not seem too interested in the Jaina - Śaiva debates that had been happening (and quite openly, and with proponents claiming Jaina authorship for Kuṟaḷ such as Mayilaisini Venkataswami, Maraimalai Adigal, Tiru.Vi.Ka (Tiru V. Kalyanasundara Mudaliyar), who were non Jainas. This was apart from the high and low caste discourse, there were other discourses on the authorship of Kuṟaḷ, which were equally important, especially in a context of centrality of Tamil language and literature in it. And there was also the context of the Dravidian movement. F.W. Ellis is just mentioned in passing, it seems, though Ellis is known to have studied Kuṟaḷ and believed to have been close to Jainas in his time, and inscribed a commemorative coin with an image of Eḷācārya a Jaina mendicant, without the beard and rudrākṣa, as he was later depicted; and continues

[73] Stuart Blackburn, "Corruption and Redemption: the Legend of Valluvar and Tamil Literary History", Modern Asian Studies, 34, 2, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp.449 – 482.
[74] Ibid, p.452

to be depicted thus in the Tamilnadu state run public transport and in school text books.

For the Tamil Jaina community reclaiming Valluvar (the author), as Eḷācārya / Kuntakunta became as significant as reminding the people of Tamilnadu of their place as Jainas in the history of Tamil literature as it were, this time, in a modern context.

The Jaina community has always been affirming its identity vis-à-vis the 'other' – be it the Buddhists; the brāhmiṇs, or the Śaiva proponents of bhakti. In the 18th century too, the 'other' is very much in the picture, but the focus shifts to one Rājā of Cenji, and later on, the Muslim nawabs of Arcot (or more broadly, the Muslims). The basic self awareness of having been victims of persecution by these varied 'others' remains a constant referral point through centuries. And it is this aspect – a continuous sequence starting from the time of the 'original' (if one may) persecution of the 7th, 8th and 9th centuries AD. And for most part, these are located in the historical, and not in realm of myth-making or mythology. Interestingly, the Śaiva bhakti inspired persecution of the Jainas, besides outright verbal abuse (and physical attacks) does resort to myth-making, as we shall see, with stories that have been recorded by Mackenzie in his compilation of palm leaf manuscripts in Tamil. Interestingly, too, this 'us' and 'them', exists also in the case of the Tamil Jainas differentiating themselves from the 'seṭh' (Marvadi, or 'northern' Śvetāmbara) Jainas.

The Kuṟaḷ and its authorship claims, then, could be seen also in terms of a Jaina –lower caste interface, when one considers the debate of the Dravidian movement – a kind of convergence. The convergence – if one may read it thus –

happened by virtue of the new understanding, stemming from a liberal, enlightened, politically consciousness of the time. Somewhere the Jainas were also part of this consciousness on the grounds that they had suffered victimisation and persecution by the brāhmiṇs and the Śaivites at various points in history.

In the Dravidian movement, the language, Tamil, and this perception of being victims and marginal (though not in the caste bracket) saw some of their more vociferous, educated sections joining hands with the movement, T. S. Sripal being one of them. Tamil literature brought about the convergence.

Interestingly, despite the fact that the present polity of the state of Tamilnadu has arisen from these very movements which fought hegemony of a particular caste and social group and its culture, we still have the universalised 'Hindu' image of Tiruvaḷḷuvar promoted by government establishments.[75]

With involvement of Tamil writers there was a movement in the colonial period and following that – to paint all literature in Tamil – classical Tamil literature – as Śaiva. Early 20th century there was a movement among Tamil Jainas to retrieve the literature, literary traditions, that were theirs, authored by Jainas. The Tamil Jaina identity question comes to the fore in this effort / movement. Retrieving Tirukkuṟaḷ (or Kuṟaḷ), Iḷaṅko Aṭikaḷ, etc. Political contexts, movements, started as anti-brāhmaṇ (or non brāhmaṇ) also

[75] Ironically, a new Jaina edition of Tirukkuṟal – with translations by Jaina scholars – which one will refer to later on – has this very same image on its book cover; despite having been published after many writings and volumes on Kuṟaḷ author being a Jaina mendicant. This just reflects the way in which images – mainstream, overpowering, arising from hegemonies – get imbibed in the community's consciousness over a period. The State, the overpowering universalising cultural idioms have a major role to play in these 'acceptances'. . Globalisation, too, and images thereof, is built and re-affirmed in the same manner in today's context, as brāhmiṇism had been in a certain past.

somewhere incorporated Tamil Jainas (DMK, later periods, with Karunanidhi speaking of, writing on Tamil Jainas, literature etc)

The Story of 'Origins' – Author of the Kuṟaḷ

"akara mutal eḻuttellām āti bagavaṉ mutaṟṟē uḷaku"

This verse for the Tamil Jainas confirms that Kuṟaḷ author was a Jaina. Because it talks of all writing from the first letter 'a' in Tamil begins with Ādi bagavaṉ. Ādi tīrthaṅkara; and with this, also happens to begin a whole debate on the community identity of the author of Kuṟaḷ, Tiruvaḷḷuvar as he later came to be known, or Eḷācārya, or Kundakundācārya).

But, one of the legends associated with the author of the Kuṟaḷ / Tirukkuṟaḷ (Vaḷḷuvar, and not Eḷācārya of the Jainas) is that he was born to a brāhmiṇ named Pakavaṉ (Bhagavaṉ) and a low caste ('pariah') named Āti (Ādi). The way this was inferred by whosoever came out with this story of origin was the first verse in the Kuṟaḷ. Incidentally, we can see similar kinds of claims being made of Kabir have 'some element' of the brāhmiṇ in him - either a brāhmiṇ mother or a brāhmiṇ father and a lower caste ('untouchable') other half. 'Jeevabandhu' Sripal says, in a general remark, "20th century (found) scholars debating about the authorship of Kuṟaḷ. The author of Kuṟaḷ was a Jaina. Others say he was not. But his work has universal ideals so the authorship there cannot be fixed to a religious association. The work has secular ideals. Many communities claim him as theirs."[76]

[76] Jeevabandhu T. S. Sripal, Tamiḻakattil Jainam (Tamil), Svasti Sri Lakshmi Sena Pattaraka Pattacaryavarya Jaina Matham, Kollapur, Parry Nilayam, Chennai, 1975; p.11

Speaking of the appropriation of Jaina texts by other communities, Sripal says, "...people of other communities, converting Jaina texts into their own." [77] And, "Fundamentalists (of other religions) are destroying Jaina literature by their entering into it in many ways. Maṇṭala Puruṭar, the author of Cūṭāmaṇi Nikaṇṭu was a Jaina according to many scholars." [78] "Maṇṭala Puruṭar has written about Tamil history, religions, vocations, etc in the 12[th] *nikaṇṭu*. He has also written about Nyāya, Vaiśesika, Mīmāṁsa....etc in palm leaf manuscripts.... Yālpānam Arumukam Navalar (in later periods) in order to induce Śaiva thoughts into this text printed his own edition of Cūṭāmaṇi Nikaṇṭu where he removed the parts (of the original text) and scripted his own two songs in this printed version." [79]

He substantiates this with an instance from the Jaina text Cūṭāmaṇi Nikaṇṭu was altered with additions by Arumuka Navalar (19[th] century writer from Jaffna, an ardent Śaiva Siddhanta conformist and revivalist who was writing and publishing on ancient Tamil works with no hidden agenda of giving them the Śaiva tinge) to make the work seem non Jaina. Thus, Sripal quotes the two versions of the nikaṇṭu – the Jaina (original) and the one published by Arumuka Navalar.

In the original Maṇṭala Puruṭar version of Cūṭāmaṇi Nikaṇṭu – speaking about the different philosophical systems prevalent in Tamiḻakam, it says

"arusamayankālen̲pā vāna naiyāyikato

tur̲aiyum vaiceṭikam meḷḷula lokā

[77] Ibid, p.23
[78] Ibid, p.37
[79] Ibid, p.38-39

kuyilimīmāmca menṟu kuṟittavai yāṉṟi nalla
neṟiyula aṟukap puttam nītiyeṉṟetu maṉṟē" [80]

The version of Arumuka Navalar reads thus –
"ariyavut camayamāre yavaṇa caivaṉ tūymai
peṟuku pācupattoṭu pirañku mavirtamaṟṟum
kurutiya viṭupēru kattu kāla mukantāṉ
maruliyavava mikka vairavam eṉ naḷakum"

And
"arupurat camayantāne yaṟaiyumlo kayatampiṉ
uṟaikaru pelattameyo rutamimaca mōṭu
kuṟiperu mayavatan kūriya pañcarātram
neṟiperu mivaiye yeṉṉa nikaḷttuvarnūl vaḷḷōre." [81]

Sripal goes on to say, "He (Navalar) tried to destroy the original Cūṭāmaṇi Nikaṇṭu but his efforts did not help the cause he was supporting. The sects Pāśupata, Kālamukham, Malirātam (Kāpālīkam)...vanished without a trace." [82]

It was important spend a little ink on Navalar here, since strangely the version that Stuart Blackburn uses to discuss the authorship claims to Kuṟaḷ, is the 11th edited version (of 1924 / 25) of Tiruvaḷḷuvamālai by the same Arumuka Navalar. This "undated Tiruvaḷḷuvamālai...contains the earliest textual reference to the 'Legend of Tiruvaḷḷuvar'...The 'garland' consists of 53 short verses attributed to as many poets, mostly of the Cañkam period, but also a disembodied voice (acarir) of the goddess of speech (namakal) and Śiva in the form of a poet..." [83] He adds, "the commentary to this verse, written at the beginning

[80] Ibid, p.39
[81] Ibid, p.39
[82] Ibid, pp.39-40
[83] Stuart Blackburn, cf.cit, p.456

of 19th century (by Navalar) then goes on to explain that the author of the Kuṟaḷ was named 'vaḷḷuvar' because he was generous (vaṇmai) in 'presenting the esoteric wisdom of the Vedas to the world'."[84]

Comparing both Sripal's comment on Arumuka Navalar, Navalar's Śaiva (Siddhānta) revivalist posture and the above statement, surely the legend of Vaḷḷuvar's birth is tinged with the religious perspective that he brought with it. The legend, as it were, is also part of a certain revivalist enterprise that came to fore and there were a large number of scholars (some with the Dravidian movement) who took sides of the Jainas saying the author of Kuṟaḷ was a Jaina. Tiru. Vi. Kalyanasundaram Mudaliyar (Tiru.Vi.Ka), R. K. Shanmugan Chettiar, S. Vaiyapuri Pillar, Mayilai Seeni Venkataswamy, R. K. Parantamanar, Madurai Kaviraja Panditar, etc were of the opinion that Tirukkural author was a Jaina.

Sripal says, "The commentator of Cīvakacintāmaṇi and Tolkāppiyam, Naccinārkiṉiyar refers to the Tirukkuṟaḷ . He uses the term tēvar and not vaḷḷuvar."[85] Again, "In ancient Tamiḻakam the author of Kuṟaḷ was referred to variously as tēvar, nāyanār, mutarpāvaḷar, teivappuḷavar, tiruvaḷḷuvanāyaṉār, etc. The 1st tīrthaṅkara Ṛṣabha is referred to as tēvar, while the rest are referred to as nāthar. Ṛṣabha is seen as the originator of the writing / learning. It is this tīrthaṅkara who is evoked in Kuṟaḷ's first couplet."[86] M. S. Ramaswami Ayyangar points out that the author of Kuṟaḷ was a Jaina – because of the term used – "malarmicai

[84] Ibid, p.456

[85] T. S. Sripal, ed, Tiruvaḷḷuvar Vāḻttum Ādibagavan (Tamil), Tamil Samanar Sangham, Ellis Nagar, reprinted, Madurai, 1998; p.5-6

[86] Ibid, p.7

yekinān" – 'he who walks on lotus' – used for a tīrthaṅkara. The commentator of Nīlakēci who was a Jaina calls Kuṟaḷ "emmoṭṭu"; Eḷācārya, the Jaina sage is believed to be the author of Kuṟaḷ; also called Kundakunda, belonged to the 1st century AD.[87]

"Tamil literary tradition attributes the authorship of Kuṟaḷ to Vaḷḷuvar; but there are strong reasons for believing that the author was a Jain....Certain references in Kuṟaḷ to 'malarmisai-yekinān' and 'yeṅkunāthan' (are) sufficient to prove that the author was a Jain. The expression malarmicai-yekinān, 'he who walks on lotus' is a very common epithet applied to Lord Arhat...."[88] Quoting the reference to Kuṟaḷ in Nīlakeci, Ayyangar adds, "this shows that the Jains believed Vaḷḷuvar to be one of them. The tradition is that one Eḷācārya, a Jain sage, was the author of Kuṟaḷ. This Eḷācārya, some say, was no other than Sri Kundakunda, a grea Jain muni, well versed in Sanskrit and Prakrit propagating Jainism in the Tamil land, in or about the 1st century AD...."[89]

A.Chakravarti says, "The book contains three great topics – aṟam (dharma); poruḷ (artha; iṇbam (kāma).The Jaina commentator of the Tamil work Nīlakeci freely quotes from the Kuṟaḷ and whenever he quotes he introduces the quotation with the words "as is mentioned in our scripture" (the expression emm-oṭṭu). From this it is clear that the commentator considered this work as an important Jaina

[87] M. S. Ramaswami Ayyangar, Studies in South Indian Jainism, Part I, Satguru Publications, Delhi, 1982; originally published in 1922.; pp.41-43

[88] Ibid, p.41

[89] Ibid, p.42-3

scripture in Tamil...."[90] A. Marx, in a paper in the Jaina Tamil monthly, says, 'while many scholars and literary figures have pointed out the Jaina inclination of the Tirukkuṟaḷ, many of those steeped in Śaivism who have written the history of Tamil literature, and who ruled for centuries (were close to the powers), managed to overshadow the Jaina incline of the Tirukkuṟaḷ. These people have brought forth (editions with) theories on Vedic thoughts in the Kuṟaḷ and Śaivite inclination...'[91] He goes on to prove that the author of Kuṟaḷ was Kunta Kuntar, also known as Eḷācārya, Padmanandi, and so forth, who also authored Prakrit texts such as Pañcāstikāya, Samayasāra, and so on.[92]

The contestation between an undivided category called "Dravidian' or of the Kuṟaḷ as a Tamil text vis-à-vis Sanskrit [93] was not the only major one so far as Kuṟaḷ was concerned. Though Stuart Blackburn does mention that various identities were proposed for the author of Kuṟaḷ such as Jaina, Buddhist, crypto-Christian, Brāhmiṇ, half- Brāhmiṇ and so on, he does little to dwell on the most long-term debate of all that started in the 19th century and continues till date, namely, that of the Kuṟaḷ being Jaina or non Jaina.

This debate would be also important to understanding the social context of the Dravidian movement – the communities that participated in the discourse on Tamil, per se and attempts at its appropriation by higher castes, the brāhmiṇs, or the brāhminised, with active support also coming in from

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[90] A.Chakravarti, Jaina Literature in Tamil, Bharatiya Jnanpith Publications, New Delhi, 1974 (originally published in 1941 by Jaina Siddhanta Bhavan, Arrah; p.37. He dates the Kuṟaḷ to the 1st century AD.

[91] A. Marx, "Tirukkuṟaḷ Eḻutiyatu Āccāriyar Kunta Kuntar", Śruta Kēvali, vol. 7, V.N Year 2529, July 2003, No. 9. (pp.37-39); p.37
[92] Ibid, p.37
[93] Blackburn, op.cit, p.452

some of the Śaivite veḷḷāḷas. Blackburn locates the entire discourse on Kuṟaḷ as "a discourse between Europeans and Tamils" which resulted "in a consensus, a mutually convenient congruence between Tamil concerns about cultural difference and European notions of moral history that produced a narrative of Tamil literary history which continues to exert its influence today."[94] It thus disregards, or negates, or chooses to ignore the entire movement within the Tamil context where the debate arose, so as to say that the debate itself arose from the European interest in the Kuṟaḷ and with their efforts to publish the same. While this may not be entirely off mark, there was yet another little known aspect to this debate where the colonialists, through their interactions with the people learnt of the existence of the Kuṟaḷ as a Jaina work.

We shall return to this argument shortly. But it may also be worthwhile to look at the social context of the participation in the larger discourse, which was essentially centered around Tamil language and a certain 'pristine' Dravidian culture, in which the Tamil Jainas found answers to their own issues with persecution and marginalisation at different periods in Tamil history, considering the enormous volume of work in Tamil that the Jainas authored through all these centuries. That the Europeans 'discovered' the Kuṟaḷ, may have, in one sense, been catalytic to bring to the fore these many claims to 'owning' the author of the Kuṟaḷ by many communities, but that would be just a continuum of earlier periods of appropriation / 'incorporation' of texts, symbols, idioms that happened in the Tamil history. As Sripal points out – with regard to appropriation of Tamil texts authored by Jainas – "....In 10th century many Jaina texts were destroyed.

[94] Ibid, p.452-3

Many were converted into Śaiva texts. Some parts of Patinenkilkanakku, Nelilakkam (mathematics texts) were converted (to show them as non Jaina, mostly, Śaivite works)...." [95] Thus, it is difficult to accept Blackburn's proposition – with respect to Kural here, which his only one part of the spectrum – that "In Valluvar's low birth, the Europeans discovered a hero of their own making; in his...teaching, the European's pursuit of an acceptable Indian religion coalesced with a Tamil desire to imagine a past independent of Brāhminical control, rituals and texts." [96]

In later periods too, we find that political ideologues (such as E.Ve. Ramasamy Periyar, as also Kamaraj, and others following them) were expressing themselves about Jaina contribution to Tamil language and literature quite openly. One of the contemporary political figures who arose from the context of the anti caste movements in Tamilnadu, for instance, Mu.Karunanidhi, himself a litterateur, says in a foreword published in a book authored by Sripal, Tamilakattil Samanam (published in December 1942), "....Well before the time of Tolkāppiyam, Jainism was firmly entrenched in Tamilnadu. If you remove the Jaina (literary) works....the realm of Tamil literature will seem empty...." [97]

Even a general perusal of the debates of the time should have directed his attention to the points of views expressed by several scholars assigning Jaina authorship to Kural. Blackburn does mention Ayotidas Panditar, founder of the Dravida Mahajana Sabha, in 1881 and the Chakya Buddhist

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[95] Jeevabandhu T. S. Sripal, Tamilakattil Jainam (Tamil), Svasti Sri Lakshmi Sena Pattaraka Pattacaryavarya Jaina Matham, Kollapur, Chennai, 1975; p.41

[96] Blackburn, op.cit, p.478

[97] T. S. Sripal, ed, Tiruvalluvar Vālttum Ādibagavan (Tamil), Tamil Samanar Sangham, Ellis Nagar, reprinted, Madurai, 1998; p.15

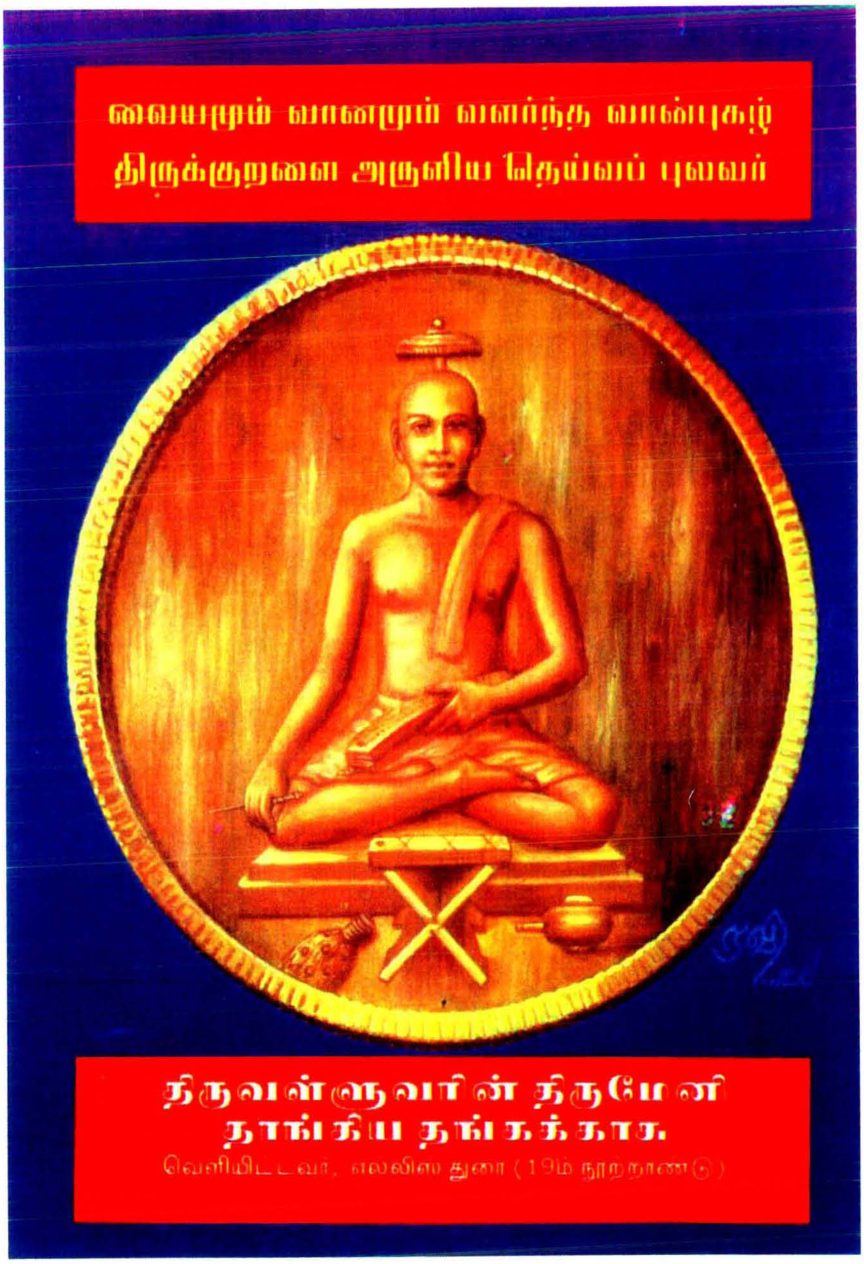


Image of the author of Tirukkural (Tiruvalluvar) inscribed on the gold coin issued by Ellis

Sangam of Madras later, who had "argued that the Tirukkuṟaḷ's original title was 'Tiri-kuṟaḷ' modeling its 3 sections on the tripartite division of Theravāda Buddhist scriptures..." [98] and his pointing to the "brāhmiṇical manipulation" [99] (of Kuṟaḷ) in various editions published in the late 1830s by a "pair of Brāhmiṇ brothers..." [100]

Missing in his proposition, though, is the question as to what were the editions / versions of the Kuṟaḷ that the Europeans he mentions (Caldwell, Kindersley, Ellis, Mackenzie manuscripts, et.al) reading? He does mention that F.W. Ellis, Collector of Madras and linguist, "produced a partial translation of the Kuṟaḷ with extensive notes, probably in 1819, but curiously makes no mention of Vaḷḷuvar's birth or legend." [101] Besides finding it 'curious' he does not dwell on the 'why' of it. In this context one wishes to bring to notice one facet of this – as to why Ellis does not mention the birth legend. Simply because he approached the Kuṟaḷ, right from the beginning, as a Jaina text. An interesting example of Ellis' 'dialogue' with the Kuṟaḷ as a text and his own understanding of the author of the Kuṟaḷ as a Jaina monk; and this keen interest was instrumental in the issuing of four commemorative gold coins by the East India Company with the image of the author of the Kuṟaḷ inscribed on one side of the coin. "The East India Company released a gold coin on Tiruvaḷḷuvar (at National Museum in Kolkata catalogue – mentions this coin). This coin was released pre-1819 as a commemoration coin and not circulated..." [102] "In a reference to this coin (in the

[98] Blackburn, op.cit, p.465-6
[99] Ibid, p.465-6
[100] Ibid, p.466
[101] Ibid, p.458; emphasis mine
[102] Iravatham Mahadevan, "Tiruvaḷḷuvarin Tirumēṉi Tāṅkiya Taṅkakkācu" (Tiruvaḷḷuvar's Image – inscribed Gold Coin), in T. S. Sripal, ed, Tiruvaḷḷuvar Vāḻttum Ādibagavan, 1998, (pp.91-103); p.91

Kolkata National Museum Catalogue), the image therein is wrongly referred to as Viṣṇu by.....P. N. Mukherjee. The front side of the coin, he said, could be that of a sage or a god-head. ... It shows a sage on a pīṭha (padmāsana position) on its back side... The date of the above mentioned gold coin must have been somewhere between 1807 and 1817." [103] Mahadevan writes "Francis White Ellis was Collector of Chennai. He learnt Tamil and other languages. He was fluent in Tamil – could read from palm leaf manuscripts. He was the first to bring to light in the western world that Sanskrit and Tamil and Dravidian languages were different. He showed keen interest in Tirukkuṟaḷ and Tiruvaḷḷuvar. He translated Kuṟaḷ into English with a commentary. This was the first translation of the Tirukkuṟaḷ. Before this could be brought out in print, he died during an inspection at Ramanathapuram. This was printed by R.P.Sethupillai. Ellis had also tried to do a linguistic evaluation of the Valayāpati (from palm leaf manuscripts)." [104]

In one of the wells he had dug during water scarcity in Chennai, at Royapettah Periyapalayathamman Koil, he inscribed lines from the Tirukkuṟaḷ:

"irupuṉalum vāynta malaiyum varupuṉalum
vallaraṇum nāṭṭiṟku uṟuppu" [105]

"The constituents of a kingdom are the two waters (from above and below), well situated hills and an indestructible fort." [106]

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[103] Ibid, p.92. Mahadevan quotes Mukherjee in *Public coins in National Museum*, p.93
[104] Ibid, p.96
[105] Ibid, p. 97
[106] verse 737, Tirukkuṟaḷ, With Translation in English by G.U.Pope, W.H. Drew, John Lazarus and F.W. Ellis, South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society, Madras, 1979 edition; p.198

Ellis was in charge of treasury and in charge of the mint. His grave stone in Dindigul shows his interest in Tiruvaḷḷuvar, Kuṟaḷ and Tamil. [107] The coin, which is in the British Museum in London[108] has the image of Tiruvaḷḷuvar as a Jaina muṇi, unlike the bearded sage made popular later around 15th century. [109] Thus Ellis' connection was with a Jaina Kuṟaḷ and hence the image on the coin is unlike the present day image.

The claims on authorship of Kuṟaḷ are as yet not totally resolved among quite a few people. The debate on the authorship was on even in the 20th century, as it may be in some circles today. For instance, in a foreword to the Tirukkuṟaḷ brought out by the Saiva Siddhanta publishers in 1958, Justice V. Subramanyam (of the then Madras High Court) writes, "Dr Pope was particularly struck by the similarity of some of the ideas expressed in the Kural with the teaching of Jesus and liked to "picture Tiruvalluvar pacing along the seashore with the Christian teachers and imbibing Christian ideas....and day by day working them into his wonderful 'Kural' [110] Few of the couplets, (according to Subramanyam find) "their echoes...in the Sermon on the Mount. But so does Tiruvalluvar's declaration that all men are equal (*piṟappōkum ellā uyiṟkkum*) find its echo in the American Declaration of Independence. Both these sets of statements form in the Kural parts of a coherent statement of doctrine which includes couplets ....which are of the essence

[107] Iravatham Mahadevan, op.cit, p.98
[108] Ibid, p.100-01
[109] Ibid, p.102. See Image.
[110] Tirukkuṟaḷ, With Translation in English by G.U.Pope, W.H. Drew, John Lazarus and F.W. Ellis, South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society, Madras, 1979 edition; p. xi

of Saiva Siddhanta Ethics..." [111] Nowhere does the Justice Subramnayam mention Jaina connection whatsoever.

As for Rev. G.U. Pope, there was an extended meaning for studying the Tirukkuṟaḷ and bringing out editions with translations. As he had said in his Preface (to the first edition) written in 1886, Sep 1, "That this publication may be useful in promoting the real study of Tamil, and so help those who go to South India as officers of government, or as missionaries, better to understand the mind of the people among whom they live and work, is my desire in sending it forth." [112]

But the Tamil Jainas have continued to bring forth volumes ascertaining - or reclaiming – Jaina authorship for Kuṟaḷ. In a recent volume of Tirukkuṟaḷ the following statement in the introduction gives their view-point all over again. "From internal evidence it is clear that the author of the Tirukkuṟaḷ could not have been a follower of the Vedic faith or of Buddhism. He openly repudiates the doctrines accepted by the Vedic school and Buddhism. Hence, we have to infer from the internal evidence that the author must have been a staunch believer in the ahimsa faith as accepted by Jainism. Besides the internal evidence from the book itself we have also important circumstantial evidences. Nachinārkiṉiyar, a famous commentator of the Cīvakacintāmaṇi, quotes from Tirukkuṟaḷ in several places of his commentary. On all such occasions, he introduces the quotation with the words 'so says Thevar'. It is a well known fact to the Tamil scholars that the term Thevar always refers to Jaina saint. The author of Cīvakacintāmaṇi is known as Tiruttakattēvar and the author of the Tamil work, Chūdāmaṇi, is known as

[111] Ibid, p xii
[112] Ibid, p.xv

Thōlāmozi Thēvar. The author of the Tirukaḷambakam is known as Uḍichi Tēvar... (Thus) the term tevar, according to recognised convention, was always used to denote a Jaina saint. It is obvious that Nachinārkiṉiyar used the term in that sense. He must have believed that the author of Tirukkuṟaḷ was a great Jaina saint"[113]

Meanwhile, claims to the authorship of Tirukkuṟaḷ were followed or preceded by claims to the image / icon of Vaḷḷuvar / Eḷācārya as well. Or perhaps there was a simultaneous movement to do so. Sripal, speaks of the temple in Mayilapur as an example. [114] He writes, "The Mayilāpur Tiruvaḷḷuvar temple today was known as nayiṉār koil around 20 years ago...The term nayiṉār was used for tīrthaṅkara and Jaina muṇis. In Madurai kantam in Cilappatikāram, Ilanko refers to the arhat temple as "nayiṉār koil". The Kaḻugumalai inscription refers to Jaina muṇis as nayiṉārs...." [115] "Mylapore was home to Jainas (such as Mayilanāthar, the commentator of Naṉṉūl, Avirodināthar, Nēmināthar, Guṇavīrapaṇḍitar and Jaina scholars, teachers). Jainas set up a temple to propitiate Tirukkuṟaḷ author and installed a pādam (footprints)....."[116] "Until the 17th century this place was settled by Jainas mostly....they were referred to as nayiṉārs." [117]

"The offering of worship to the footprints by Jainas gradually stopped ... (and) some 100 to 120 years ago a sculpted figure of Tirukkural Valluvar with a beard was set

[113] A. Chakravarti, Ramshankar Mishra, N. Sundaram, Tirukkuṟaḷ (An Explanatory Translation), Prakrit Bharati Academy, Jaipur, 1999; p.86

[114] T. S. Sripal, ed, Tiruvaḷḷuvar Vālttum Ādibagavan (Tamil), Tamil Samanar Sangham, Ellis Nagar, reprinted, Madurai, 1998 (pp.80ff)

[115] Ibid, pp.80-81
[116] Ibid, pp.82-83
[117] Ibid, p.84

up as mūlavar behind the footprints. In time, the foot prints were stowed away. But people had altercations with the then arcakas and they took out the footprints and placed them in the outer maṇṭapa....Even these were removed in time, and buried within the temple walls; again after some protest from Jainas and few from other communities around, they were brought out into the open...." [118] "The name *Tiruvulla nayiṉār* was transformed into *Tiruvaḷḷuvar* around the same time period, according to residents staying in that area..." [119]

"On February 16th 1947, Tiru. Vi. Ka and many others attended the anniversary celebrations held at the Mylapore, Kuyapettai Viraperumal street, of the Mayilai Tiruvaḷḷuvar Kaḻakam. Many were antagonised when Sripal spoke of this history (of conversion)" [120] "T.P. Minakshisundaram, Rev. Arul Thangayya, K.Anbazhagan and others visited the temple and saw the footprints, and spoke to an old woman who called it *nayiṉār koil*, spontaneously...." [121]

Meanwhile, Tirukkuṟaḷ was not the only Tamil text that was being presented as a work of a non Jaina (half brāhmiṇ, or fully brahmin) [122] Thus, in a foreword in English, written in 1943 (September) to a book by T.S. Sripal published in 1957, titled *'Iḷaṅkōvaṭikaḷ Samayam Yātu?* [123] 'Rao Bahadur' A. Chakravarti (the Tamil Jaina philosopher, academic who translated Nīlakeci and whom we have mentioned before) notes, "The booklet... has two objects in view , one to

[118] Ibid, p.85-6
[119] Ibid, p.87
[120] Ibid, p.88
[121] Ibid, p.89
[122] Incidentally, even if there were efforts, as cited in the case of Ayotidas Panditar, to make the text seem Buddhist, the Jainas have been more responsive and sensitive to the claims made for Tirukkuṟaḷ from brāhmiṇs and those of Śaivite religious orientation. Tamil Jainas writing in that period as part of the debate, do not mention, or take issue with, Buddhist 're-writing' of Kuṟaḷ, and so on.
[123] T. S. Sripal, Iḷaṅkovaṭikaḷ Samayam Yātu? (Tamil) Parry Nilayam (Boradway) Chennai, 1957

establish the fact that the author of Silappadikāram is a Jaina by faith and second to condemn the present day insidious movement by literary plagiarism backed up by influential people . (The author) pointed out from the txt itself that not only the author Iḷangovaṭigal is a Jaina by faith, but even his brother, the ruling king of Cēra kingdom, was also a Jaina by faith..." [124] And he adds, "It is rather painful to learn that there is an organisation, ostensibly working in the name of revival of Tamil culture but intended to tamper with important Jaina classics in Tamil so that they might appear as works by non Jaina authors. It is also painful to note that rich and influential people are backing up this movement. The same thing occurred in South India during the period of revivalism and unfortunate Jaina ascetics were barbarously murdered in the name of religion for the simple reason that they were condemning the Vedic sacrifice in uncompromising terms, since it was conflicting with their own principle of ahimsā...That the same spirit should be prevalent in serious form even in the 20th century is extremely deplorable ...the same religious hatred is at the back of this movement which pretends to be working for the revival of Tamil culture but indulges in the base form of literary plagiarism complained by Mr. T. S. Sripal...." [125] He then makes a plea , "And let us hope... that there will be a real and true revival of ancient Tamil culture which is the pride of south India." [126]

Note that he is talking of a revival of 'Tamil culture', as a universal concept. And in this universal Tamil-ness it is important to establish the (Tamil) Jaina identity. Thus, simultaneously with the Dravidian movement – a movement

[124] Ibid, p.vi
[125] Ibid, pp.vii-viii; emphasis, wherever, mine.
[126] Ibid, p ix, emphasis mine.

where caste consciousness was discussed openly – a movement of identity consciousness of the Jainas was also happening. Protest against brāhmiṇ (or 'Hindu') dominance – by this time the term 'Hindu' is used in some of the Tamil texts written to counter these claims of authorship by Jainas and those supporting their point of view[127] was also part of the 'Tamil' Jaina identity consciousness which was also building up in a new way.

Most scholars writing in English on the history of Jainism in Tamilnadu have not made a mention of these debates that continued to happen until the independence movement and years thereafter. It seems to end at the bhakti period and persecution in that context. There is, incidentally, no work that discusses the issues of identity of communities such as the Buddhists and Jainas from these perspectives, especially, when it came to the one of the most important modern socio-cultural-political movements of Tamilnadu, the one centered on caste and dissent-based dominance. Both during the independence movement and thereafter. Perhaps one of the reasons lies in limiting the Jaina side of the history of Tamilnadu to an 'ancient' or 'early medieval' past and not being concerned of movements thereafter? [128]

Affirming identity through Textual Tradition

The Tamil Jaina identity is closely linked to the Tamil language and literature, literary traditions. In this sense, the Tamil Jainas not only kept close watch on the 'trends' of

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[127] Mayilai Sini Venkataswamy, who wrote extensively on the Tamil Jaina literature and history of Jainism in Tamiḻakam uses the term "(h)indu matam" extensively (sometimes interchangeably for Śaiva Vaiṣṇava bhakti movement) in his reference to the Śaiva – Vaiṣṇava and Jaina religious conflict.

[128] However, few scholars, such as Iravatham Mahadevan – with a dynamic relationship with the Tamil Jaina community on account of the volume of research he has done on Brāhmi inscriptions and the Jaina connections thereof – have at intervals discussed issues that go beyond the 'ancient'. The subject of the Gold coin, and Ellis, for instance, albeit in terms of bringing into the open an important historical fact.

efforts in affecting their right to the literary traditions in any way. That included fighting for, establishing, re-asserting claims of authorship of Tirukkuṟaḷ, Cilappatikāram, among others, but more importantly these texts, which at various points, were taken up for 'Śaivising' renditions or to negate the Jaina association with these texts by other communities. It is interesting to note that in different periods in time, one of the responses of the Jaina community to persecution, and conflict with dominating (or contesting) ideologies was to produce written material, be it in Prakrit, at times Sanskrit, or in local languages of the regions they occupied, Kannada, Tamil and so forth. And in these written texts they tried to present the 'case', as it were, of their identity, perspectives on developments of the time. This aspect may be seen as part of the pan Jaina history. With its regional variations, corresponding to the socio-cultural and political contexts of the times. Thus, in the Tamil country, A. Chakravarti writes, "We have testimony to the fact that Vajranandi a Jain grammarian and scholar and the pupil of Devanandi Pujyapada, an accomplished Jaina Sanskrit grammarian in the Kannada country of the 6th century AD, and author of a grammatical treatise, Jainendra, one of the 8 principal authorities on Sanskrit grammar, went over to Madurai with the object of founding a sangam there. Of course, that Sangam could not have been anything else than a college of Jain ascetics and scholars engaged in religious propaganda of their own. This movement must have first brought in the idea of a Sangam to the Tamil country. It is more likely that following closely the persecution of the Jains ruthlessly carried out in the 7th century AD, the orthodox Hindu party must have tried to put their own house in order and to the creation of Sangams with divinity too playing a part therein, for the purpose of adding to the authority and dignity of their literature. It was the

sacerdotal Sangam of the early Jains that most probably supplied the orthodox party with a clue for the story a literary Sangam of their own on that model. The very name Sangam, unknown to the early Tamils, proclaims its late origins and to attempt to foisting the idea it signified on the so called Sangam literature as its inspiring cause is little short of perpetrating a glaring and absurd anachronism." [129]

Mayilai Sini Venkataswamy, too says, "Vajranandi (vikrama 526, AD 470) established Dravida sangha in Madurai, and this is mentioned in Devasenā's Darśana Sāram." [130] "This was not a literary sangam as understood but a sangha of monks." [131]

"We know from reading medieval Jain philosophy texts and literary works that one way in which Jains met the challenge of both linguistic and religious plurality was to become versatile scholars and polyglots ....." writes Granoff [132]. Of course, she is talking of the 'chiṇḍika' stories, stories that the Jainas wrote to counter Buddhist influence on their laity (Buddhism, she says, being most attractive counter-system to the Jaina laity of the time); 'chiṇḍika' stories were stories of temporary 'lapses' of the laity, who 'return' to the path of true Jaina life, after 'straying' from that path either by circumstance, or consciously. These stories, she points out, reflect the Jaina acceptance at some level of Buddhism to attract its laity. "Jains met the Buddhist challenge head on;

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[129] A. Chakravarti, Jaina Literature in Tamil, Bharatiya Jnanpith Publications, New Delhi, 1974 (originally published in 1941 by Jaina Siddhanta Bhavan, Arrah; p.16

[130] Mayilaisini Venkataswamy, Samaṉamum Tamiḻum (Tamil), South India Saiva Siddhanta Publication, Tirunelveli, 1954; p.8 Also, in "Digambara Darsana", Journal of Royal Asiatic Society, Vol. XVII, p.74.

[131] Ibid, p.8

[132] Phyliss, Granoff, "Being in Minority: Medieval Jain Reactions to Other Religious Groups", in N. N. Bhattacharya, ed, Jainism and Prakrit in Ancient and Medieval India, Manohar, Delhi, 1994 (pp.241-266); p.261. In the chapter on Nilakeci, one has touched on stories of a Jaina woman being married to a Buddhist on the sly.

they studied Buddhist epistemology and ontology. They observed Buddhist rituals and read Buddhist monastic rules and challenged them openly in their Sravakacara texts. And they wrote stories in which they acknowledged the attractiveness of Buddhism, even allowed monks and lay devotees to lapse into Buddhism, and accepted them back as proof of the true supremacy of Jainism."[133]

"Jain scholars not only read assiduously and wrote prodigiously in every branch of learning. They also undertook massive projects of copying texts and they carefully preserved their manuscripts in extensive libraries....Many Jain philosophical texts are also debates, and give evidence of the fact that the Jains did not withdraw into the seclusion of their own community but actively sought to engage other groups on intellectual issues that concerned them." [134] "The term paḷḷikūṭam for schools in Tamil comes from the Jain term paḷḷi. Rich Jainas reproduced and made copies of texts to people at times of weddings, death rituals as palm leaf manuscripts. In 10th century AD, the Kannada Attimabe gave dana of 1000 copies of Śāntipurāṇa as dāna. The Jainas propagated Tamil language – the language of the region – in textual tradition, unlike the brāhmiṇs..."[135]

The Jainas, thus, continued to participate in public debate through different periods through their textual tradition, creating new ones, or their own versions of the established traditions; affirming and re asserting their identity as Jaina through these activities. For instance, "soon after the time when the secular epic, the Rāmāyaṇa had been converted into

[133] Ibid, p.261
[134] Ibid, p.242
[135] Mayilai Sini Venkataswamy, op.cit, pp.43-44

sacred Vaiṣṇava literature by the Bhargava brāhmiṇs and the hero, Rāma had been recorded as an avatara of Viṣṇu, a Jaina poet, Vimalasūri, in the early centuries AD, wrote his version of the Rāmāyaṇa in Prakrit, the Pauma Cariyu. Vimalasūri states specifically that his is the true version as against that of the brāhmaṇ's, which is a collection of falsehoods....(wherein) Rāvaṇa is an ardent Jaina and a protector of Jaina shrines....has the ability of fly and is therefore called ākāśamārgi...."[136]

Or then there were other ways of establishing a 'true' Jaina identity – to counter the hegemony of the time. Thus, "Jinasenā's Ādipurāṇa discharged the function of a law book containing recommendations and prohibitions addressed to the followers of a Jina. Prior to his time, the Jaina books of discipline concerned themselves with the conduct of monks and nuns alone. There were guide books (Śrāvakācāras) to instruct the laity in keeping with the vows prescribed and set forth the procedures for their observation. But the Jainas lacked the type of law book comparable to the Manusmrti, for example, in the Brāhmaṇic tradition. Jinasenā's Ādipurāṇa fills this need and carries with it the kind of authority one associates with the dharmaśāstra literature pertaining to the duties of the castes, rites of passage, and so forth. In writing the Ādipurāṇa, Jinasenā thus introduced a new function or the Jaina Purāṇas, namely, educating the Jaina community to preserve its identity as separate from that of the Brāhmiṇs, a task that they perceived was necessary in the face of the Brāhmaṇic attempts to absorb them."[137]

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[136] Romila Thapar, Cultural Transaction and Early India: Tradition and Patronage, OUP, Delhi, 1987; p.14

[137] Padmanabh S. Jaini, Collected Papers on Jaina Studies, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 2000; p. 411

The text then, to the Jaina, meant an important component of their self identity; and it may be reinstated here that the question of identity and constructing an identity, or history for themselves did not come with the Europeans or with liberal, enlightenment ideologies. Asserting their identity was something that started off for them, as for the Buddhists, with the original refuting of the authority, primordiality, supremacy of the Vedas and the social group that possessed the knowledge, and power from possessing knowledge, the brāhmiṇs. In that sense the Jainas could be said to have made it important to share their textual heritage rather than let a group maintain control over these. In the Tamil context, one can still find several instances of families having palm leaf manuscripts and temples with manuscripts that are available to the lay reader or any one interested in reading them. They are not controlled by a group or an establishment – though the maṭha today has some of these manuscripts for the sake of preserving the same for posterity. But no one refuses to share the manuscripts they may happen to possess. It was thus necessary for the Jainas to affirm their identity through concepts such as 'śāstradāna' (giving, sharing knowledge, learning, texts) among other kinds of dāna; in that sense, very different from the Vedic knowledge being the preserve of the brāhmiṇs.

One would like to draw attention here to an interesting 'aside', so to speak. An advertisement that appears in a book published in 1925[138], which is as follows: -
"The Devendra Printing and Publishing Company limited (Amman Koil Street , G.T.Madras, Rampaul Press, 23, Davidson Street), Madras "formed for the purpose of

[138] Harisattya Bhattacharya, Divinity in Jainism, The Devendra Printing and Publishing Company, Madras, 1925. I thank the staff and Theodore Bhaskaran for giving me access to this book, and perhaps the only copy of it, in the Roja Muthaih Research Library at Chennai.

printing and publishing the sacred Jaina literature in English and in the important vernaculars".... "Please help the cause of propagating Truth by taking shares in the Company" (500 shares of Rs. 10 each)."

Inside the flap of the same (above) book –
The Jaina Gazette ((annual subscription Rs. 3!)) - the monthly organ of the All India Jaina Association

"This is the only journal in the Jaina community which is conducted in English and therefore circulated not only all over India but throughout the world. It treats about all topics regarding the Jainas and Jainism. Besides devoting special attention to the problems calculated to ameliorate the social and political status of the Jains and the propagation of Jainism, the Jaina Gazette contains original articles and reviews of whatever is of public interest in contemporary life and opinion."

The Swarajya observes –
"The Jaina Gazette contains very interesting and valuable articles on important topics in Eastern and Western philosophy, Indian history, literature, law and science based on up-to-date research."

The Managing Director of this printing press, incidentally, was one C. S. Mallinath (also Editor of Jaina Gazette) who was one of the members of the deputation of Tamil Jaina community that was nominated by their Chief pontiff (of Melcittamur) to the Ministers to impress upon the Government to Government to reserve at least 2 seats for the

Jains in the council and the local boards and that the Government include Jains in the list of backward classes.[139]

Another authorship debate

A similar case of contestation over authorship (and by extension, Tamil language) may be seen in the legend of Agastya, the sage, being the teacher of Toḷkāppiyar. Jainas believe and assert that Toḷkāppiyam is a Jaina work – by virtue of the very nature of discussion in it over the concept of senses – *'aṟivu'* . "Toḷkāppiyar divides the vegetable kingdom into two categories, the exogenous and endogenous plants. Plants which possess exterior hardness are called 'pul' (grass family) and others whose core is of close grain go by the name 'maṟam' (tree). Similarly, he also classifies living organisms under six heads – oraṟivuyiru, having the sense of touch alone, iraṟivuyiru, having the senses of touch and taste, mūvaṟivuyiru, having the senses of touch, taste, smell and sight, aiyaṟivuyiru, senses of touch, taste, smell, sight and hearing, and finally, āraṟivuyiru, having senses of touch, smell, sight, hearing and power of discrimination added to these." [140] "In the section maṟabiyal, Toḷkāppiyam speaks of jīvas with one sense – grass and trees; with 2 senses – snails; with three senses – ants; four senses – higher animals and jīvas with 5 senses – human beings. This is (based on) a philosophical doctrine of the Jainas. Mērumandarapurāṇam and Nīlakesi contain description of jīvas (as well)." [141]

Coming back to the question of authorship of Toḷkāppiyam it shows that most of the Jaina literary tradition was at some

[139] One shall revisit this point subsequently while talking of identity and conflict.
[140] Toḷkāppiyam 1526, referred in V.T. Manickam, Marutam: An Aspect of Love in Tamil Literature, Karaikkudi, 1982, p.33
[141] A. Chakravarti, Jaina Literature in Tamil, Bharatiya Jnanapitha Publications, New Delhi, 1974 (revised edition, originally published in 1941 by Jaina Siddhanta Bhavan, Arrah); p. 22

point being appropriated (or efforts were made to do so) and re - 'presented' using brahminical motifs, metaphors. This kind of contestation – over authorship, however, is not perceptible between Jaina and Buddhist traditions, though at a point the proponents of these two faiths were equally at 'war' with each other, with numerous debates being written about in their texts. Especially on the question of whose 'ahimsā' concept was the truer.

"Tradition says that Agastya was the only grammarian who wrote complete treatises on the grammar of all the three classes of Tamil, but none of them are now extant..." [142] One sees an interesting subversion of the Sanskritised 'northern' Agastya induction into Tamil sacred lore in the myths associated with the Tamil god, Murukaṉ. While Murukaṉ's association with the Tamil language – as the originator of the language – is by itself a significant metaphor.

With Murukaṉ transforming from an originally hill – forest dwelling deity of the hunter gatherers and forest dwelling tribes in Tamiḻakam to a universalised Subrahmaṇya, son of Śiva, a mythic corpus evolved around him. But it was difficult to completely appropriate the local deity. The power of the local tradition dominated in some places and one of them was to give Murukaṉ the role of the teacher of Śiva. He teaches Śiva the praṇava (Om) mantra in one of the myths. Along with this, since he was the Tamil god par excellence, having his own sway well before he Purāṇic pantheon entered the scenario, he also became the origin of the Tamil language.[143]

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[142] M.S. Ramaswamy Ayyangar, Tamil Studies: Essays on the History of the Tamil People, Language and Literature, AES Reprint, 1986, p.188 below.
[143] One engaged with Murukaṉ and the sacred lore Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai in some depth in one's MPhil dissertation, titled, 'Images of Murukaṉ: Perceptions of a Popular Deity and the Arupaṭaivīṭu in the

This entire process becomes all the more interesting when one looks at the evolution of Murukaṉ into Subrahmaṇya, against agrarian expansion and rise of the Śaivite bhakti ethos. Not entirely co-incidentally, the Arupaṭaivīṭu concept of Murukaṉ's sacred geography – the six sacred centres of Murukaṉ – Subrahmaṇya developed in places associated with Jaina sacred centres of the past. Most of these centres had rock cut caves or natural caverns in and around that place commemorating Jaina monks and nuns. This Purāṇic attempt to associate Tamil as a language to Murukaṉ (at the time of composing talapurāṇams / sthalapurāṇas, he is already the son of Śiva who learns from his son) signifies a very obvious contestation for Tamil between the Śaiva movement and Jainism. Murukaṉ, incidentally, in the early Caṅkam works is devoid of the language metaphor / motif. And one must assume that the idea of linking Murukaṉ with Tamil language was a way to counter the Jaina authorship of a large collection of Tamil works. And this must have happened after Murukaṉ – Subrahmaṇya was firmly established as a deity in the centres which had links with the Jaina ācāryas and laity (visiting them) prior to this.

At the same time, it needs to be mentioned that many of the myths associated with Murukaṉ are themselves to be seen as signifiers of a more basic conflict and uneasy, unsettling juxtapositions taking place before a final (?) codified all-encompassing Purāṇic mythic corpus is established in Tamilakam within which Murukaṉ, Koṟṟavai, Māl, and each of the local gods and goddesses of villages, hills and forests are linked together, and have a role each (or more) to play. Kamil Zvelebil, speaking of the Murukaṉ-Tamil link,

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Tirumurakāṟṟuppaṭai'. The present work on Jainas in Tamiḻakam originated in / with this engagement, and one might be able to show the connections in the course of the present work.

believes Murukaṉ's association with Tamil to be 'deeper' than the Agastya legend, which was incorporated later. [144]

Stuart Blackburn does acknowledge these older (pre-European interest in Tamil country) continuums of struggle in Tamil history over Tamil language and literature when he says, "In the south Indian context at least, the colonial impact was filtered through a pre-existing, though never static, debate about the origins of Tamil and its position vis-a-vis Sanskrit" [145] And he does acknowledge also, "the Tirukkuṟaḷ, written after the Sangam poems but before the bhakti movement, was a contentious text in Tamil literary history long before Europeans came to India..." [146] Yet, he somewhere fails to locate the discourse on Kuṟaḷ beyond the Tamil-Sanskrit dichotomy, when he writes, "In Vaḷḷuvar's triumph at Madurai, the outsiders' need to view (south) India as an ancient and fallen, yet redeemable culture matched the need felt by many Tamil intellectuals for a literary history that rescued a pure Tamil from a decadent Sanskrit." [147] And this was not the only divide that symbolised the contest over Kuṟaḷ. But that the Jainas, who participated in the contest in a more sustained manner than most, do not figure in Blackburn's hypothesis is the question.

And what role does caste play in these contestations is in itself an interesting exercise. R. Champakalakshmi points out that during the 7th – 8th centuries AD, "The Śaiva sect's core constituency was provided by the Veḷāḷas and non brāhmaṇa agricultural community and in the fact that although the Śaiva hymns and Śaiva Siddhanta canon were composed and compiled by Veḷāḷas and brāhmaṇas, the heads

[144] Kamil Zvelebil, Tamil Traditions on Subrahmaṇya-Murugaṉ, Madras, 1991
[145] Stuart Blackburn, op.cit, p.478
[146] Ibid, p.478
[147] Ibid, p.478

of the sectarian Śaiva maṭhas were invariably Veḷāḷas."[148] She adds, "Even the language of Śaiva scriptures , i.e. Tamil and of Vaiṣṇava scriptures, i.e., Tamil and Sanskrit and Maṇipravāḷam, are said to closely relate to the differences that developed in the cultural milieu and caste orientation after the period of the bhakti saints, the Śaivas becoming predominantly Veḷāḷa and the Vaiṣṇavas predominantly brāhmaṇas."[149]

T. S. Sripal writes, "In AD 7th and 8th centuries, the vaṇikar and veḷḷāḷar communities converted from Jainas to Śaivas." [150] Further, "They smeared sacred ash on their foreheads (*tirunīr – nīr pūciya*). These communities are vegetarian till date."[151] "In villages the Jaina and Śaivas (thus converted) peasants are called veḷḷāyar; nīr pūci veḷḷāyar."[152]

Appar is one of the Śaiva bards who was instrumental in zealous proselytisation and conversion of many veḷḷāḷas into Śaiva faith. Perhaps he was the original of the 'nīr-pūci nayiṉārs' (the Śaiva veḷḷāḷas 'who smeared sacred ash', perhaps metaphorically, if not otherwise) that the Tamil Jainas refer to. A subject / story we shall return to later. According to the Tamil Jainas – in all my interactions with them in each village – Appar was a Jaina who took to the Śaiva faith and got close to the ruling elite; and like so

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[148] R. Champakalakshmi, "From Devotion to Dissent to Dominance: the Bhakti of the Tamil Āḻvārs and Nāyaṉārs" in R. Champakalakshmi, S. Gopal, eds, Tradition, Dissent and Ideology: Essays in Honour of Romila Thapar, OUP, Delhi, 1996 (pp. 135-163); p. 152-3

[149] Ibid, pp.152-153

[150] T. S. Sripal, Ilangōvaṭikal Samayam Yātu? (Tamil), Parry Nilayam (Boradway), Madras, 1957; p.31

[151] Ibid, p.32. It must also be mentioned that this community too, completes its dinner before dark, much like the Jainas do, as one has seen it in practice in villages such as Arpakkam and Magaral – where the Jainas converted into Śaiva veḷḷāḷas thanks to Appar and Sambandar's religious crusade. Their homes too, have symbols that are very similar to the ones seen in Tamil Jaina households, especially the 'kumbam' (urn) on their entrance walls.

[152] Ibid, p.32

many new converts, went on a mission to exterminate Jainas from Tamilakam. In their view two of the Śaiva bards, Appar and Gñānasampantar were most vociferous opponents of the Jaina faith. As Champakalakshmi puts it, "Appar ...laments his past association with the Jains and expresses his gratitude to Śiva for having rendered him from the sin of such association (102, Tiruvārūr) Campantar was a crusader, and his denunciation of the Jainas and Buddhists was instrumental in bringing about their decline at the royal court of the Pāṇḍyas. ...Every tenth verse of his patikam systematically abuses the Jains and Buddhists..."[153]

Stories abound as to why Appar chose to become Saiva. "Appar (was a) contemporary of the Pallava king Mahendra I (AD 600 – 630) whose capital was Kāñci. Appar was born about 600 AD in a rich veḷḷāḷa family at the village in the South Arcot district. He got in touch with the Jaina scholars and became a zealous convert to their faith. To get rid of an acute colic pain he went, at the instance of his devout sister, to a Śiva temple and broke forth into a song of prayer... (Śiva) relieved (him) of pain and in a voice from heaven gave him the title Tirunāvukkaraṣu (the blessed king of speech, Sanskrit equivalent of Vāgīśa; the saint is known as Vāgīśa also). An ardent devotee of Śiva (he) initiated Pallava king into the Śaiva faith. The boy saint Sambandar affectionately called him 'Appar' (father) (and) since then (he has) this appellation. He is said to have composed 49,000 decads of hymns, of which 311 are extant."[154]

Similar phantasmagoric tale of other 'saints' prevail (to this day) - "Sambanda is said to have been born about AD 639 to

[153] R. Champakalakshmi, op.cit, p. 149

[154] Satchidananda Pillai, "Saiva Saints of South India" in H. Bhattacharya, Cultural Heritage of India, IV, Part II, 1956; 1959 reprint; p. 341

a brāhmaṇ couple of Shiyali. Śiva and Pārvati are said to have appeared before him and fed him in a golden cup, the milk of spiritual potency. Abiding wisdom and power entered into him (and he thus became) Gñānasambandar....He condemned what he disliked in the life and teachings of Jainas and Buddhists of his time. After re-establishing Śaivism in the Pāṇḍyan kingdom (he) returned to the Choḷa land; from where he started on a northern tour...He is said to have sung in all 16,000 decads of hymns, of which only 384 are extant..."[155]

About Appar and Sambandar, K. R. Venkatarama Ayyar writes, "In the seventh century, Mahendra Varman I of Kanchi (600 - 630) and Arikēsari Parāñkusa Nedumāraṉ (670 -710) of Madurai were both Jains, before they were converted to the Saiva faith, the former by Appar and the latter by Sambandar. Under royal support Kanchi with the surrounding villages and Madurai with the surrounding hills teemed with a considerable Jain population, and the present day site of Jinakanchi bears sufficient testimony to this. Appar, Sambandar and Sundarar among the Śaiva Nāyaṉārs, and the Vaishṇava Āḷvārs had to tour the land and vanquish in controversy their Jain opponents before they could make them accept their faith. The immediate result was that Pāṭaliputra, now Tiruppapuliyur (Cuddalore), Arpakkam, Magaral, Madurai and other places were lost by the Jains."[156]

Sripal notes that Appar was the 'Appaṉ muṇivar', a popular name from Dharmasenā, a Jaina ascetic at Tirunaṟuṅgoṇḍai.

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[155] Ibid, p.342

[156] K.R. Venkatarama Ayyar, "South Indian Jainism", Reprinted from the Transactions of the Archaeological Society of South India, 1957-58; I thank Prof. Champakalakshmi for making this paper accessible to me.

[157] He preached from there, treated illnesses and so on. People called him 'Appar' out of love and respect. In Śaiva accounts Appar converted to Śaivism when he couldn't be cured of a stomach ache, at his sister's behest. Thus, that he was a Jaina who converted to Śaivism is a common story. Appar became the 'true' new convert in denouncing all Jaina monks and the community. Not only this, he managed to convert many others to Śaivism (especially the veḷḷāḷas) in the course of his visit to many villages which had Jaina (or Buddhist) associations."[158]

One has shown in the chapter that dwells on Nīlakeci, that the 'pēy' Nīli's stories in the Śaivite renditions of it, always shows great emphasis on the motif of the "eḻupatiṉmar" the 70 veḷḷāḷas who jumped into the pyre to keep their word. Their keeping their word is made a lot of in the Śaivite versions. The veḷḷāḷa connection of the Śaivite bards was in no small way responsible for this reading.

The subject of caste in the Tamil Jaina and Śaivite conflict is a complex and interesting one to focus on, considering that most of the Tamil Jainas are from the veḷḷāḷa social group themselves. It may be well worth considering the processes that led to a small section of them becoming staunch Śaivite in their inclination, entering the bhakti paradigm, and abusing members of their own clan. Or, reasons for the popularity of the Jaina religion among the vellalas at one point, transforming to popular acceptance of an order most contrary to their faith. One of the reasons, of course, as Champakalakshmi put it, would be that "Bhakti would seem to have emanated and spread in a context of

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[157] Jeevabandhu T. S. Sripal, Tamilakattil Jainam (Tamil), Svasti Sri Lakshmi Sena Pattaraka Pattacaryavarya Jaina Matham, Kollapur, Parry Nilayam, Chennai, 1975; p.112

[158] Ibid, p.112

rivalry for social dominance and royal patronage as seen in Kanchipuram and Madurai which were the centers of such conflict and change."[159]

The process whereby this happened, the story of the 70 veḷḷālas who jumped into the pyre, the regional context of Jaina settlements in south Arcot, the 'nīr-pūci nayiṉār' account, are all seemingly disparate motifs that perhaps point to the underlying processes of these caste dynamics which Tamil Jainas engaged with, countered, negotiated spaces with, or simply succumbed. [160]

One has referred to Rajan Gurukkal on the discursive processes, the agrarian order and caste in social relations earlier. He notes, "The formation of agrarian localities was an ongoing process, and everywhere it accomplished a uniform structure of social relations irrespective of whether they were brāhmaṇa settlements (brahmadēyas) or veḷḷāṉ-vakai settlements (ūr). The social structure was a hierarchy with landholders (brahmadēyas – kīḻavaṉ in the case of brahmadēya and ūrār / nāṭṭār in the case of veḷḷāṉ-vakai settlements) at the apex and the large number of leaseholders (kāṟalar) who were mostly artisans and craftsmen, in the middle, placed over the primary production (aṭiyāḷar) who were at the bottom." [161] The Jainas (veḷḷāḷa agriculturists) somewhere do not figure in this process / understanding.

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[159] R. Champakalakshmi, op.cit, p.157

[160] When one started off, looking for 'Tamil Jainas' the caste question had not occurred. There were many stories, narratives that had to be recorded, documented, to be made sense of. The present study does not do complete justice to the caste question in its limited purview. At some point, this question needs to be dealt with in greater depth – for this aspect too has a continuum through different periods in the history of Tamiḻakam. For some reason when it came to writing the history of Jainism in Tamilnadu, this question of the caste dynamics, the processes, taking from the numerous narratives of the community, has not been given adequate attention.

[161] Rajan Gurukkal, "Towards a New Discourse: Discursive Processes in Early South India", in R.Champakalakshmi and S. Gopal, eds, Tradition, Dissent and Ideology: Essays in Honour of Romila Thapar, OUP, Delhi, 1994 (pp.313 – 334); p.332

Again, "The brāhmaṇs being a non cultivating group by themselves, had to depend upon the familial labour of neighbouring clans for the cultivation of their land. This meant making some permanent arrangement for the supply of labour in the brāhmaṇa households obviously a system transcending kinship. The brāhmaṇa land with this household thus emerged as an independent unit of production with working clansmen families attached to it. The centre of brahmana households is referred to in poems as 'pāṟpaṉa-c-cēṟi' ....an alternative system of agrarian relations counterposed to what was dominant...."[162] Herein it may be noted that same was case of Jaina agricultural land; and to this day the term '*nayiṉār-teṟu*' is used to refer to Tamil Jaina hamlets, cluster of settlements in a village.

Gurukkal adds that "With the manifestation of the bhakti discourse as a temple based movement in the 7th – 8th centuries the formation of the dominant ideology of the agrarian society was complete."[163] While there seems now a general consensus on the understanding of this side of the 'discursive' process in Tamilnadu, there is still a question as to where the Tamil Jaina 'veḷḷāḷa' agriculturists – facing persecution from the nāyaṉmārs and āḻvārs – figure in this entire discursive process. Is it time to look at the persecution from outside the purview of a religious ('communal') conflict alone and try to re visit the nature of this agrarian expansion, to look at this very interesting intra-veḷḷāḷar conflict between the Śaiva and Jaina veḷḷāḷars? By the post bhakti period the Jainas seem to have a relatively greater hold over south Arcot and surrounding areas rather than Madurai and Kancipuram of the early periods. Where they forced to migrate to the former region

[162] Ibid, p.324
[163] Ibid, p.333

at some point? It has been mentioned elsewhere that the Jaina maṭha of Jinakāñci was shifted to Cittāmūr (towards the 14th-15th century AD). And it is a different mater that by this time, again there is a 'fresh round' of persecution stories involving the Tamil Jainas and the rulers of the time. And again the 'nīr-pūci' veḷḷāḷars concept figures in this. Thus the history of the Tamil Jaina community does not remain a static one that can be explained against the dominance of the bhakti, agrarian expansion of that period, royal patronage and decline within a period of 7th to 9th centuries AD. It continues through other periods, beyond the bhakti paradigm, constantly seeking to refresh the identity question. But most certainly the bhakti period persecution sets the 'base' for marginalisation of the community which never quite manages to get back to a status it aimed for, in the early centuries BC, and AD.

By and large, however, there seems to be a negation of the agrarian aspect / qualification of the Tamil Jaina community in almost all the works on early medieval Tamilakam. And agrarian expansion by extension is invariably associated with brāhmiṇical systems. Jainas are mentioned in most works as traders and artisans. Surely, there should be a meaning to the number of land grants and paḷḷiccantam and sarvamānyam (rendering tax-free) grants made to the Jainas recorded in Copper plate charters, temple inscriptions across south Arcot, North Arcot, Kancipuram districts and other places? Rajan Gurukkal says, "Though there is no reason to believe that the Jainas and Buddhists were concerned about the values of agrarian society, their interest in social peace has always been in favour of the communities engaged in exchange, whose operations required peace and order as an esoteric pre-requisite. This circumvents the discursive needs of agriculturists and social groups engaged in exchange of

goods..."[164] There seems an almost altruistic association of the Jainas and Buddhists with 'peace and order'. This in a sense denies the severe debates that ensued between these two sects for gaining both state and popular patronage. Moreover, when Jaina textual tradition speaks of the origins of four occupations[165] – agriculture being the foremost in order of importance – as devised by the 1st tīrthaṅkara Ṛṣabha, surely at some point in history there was a full-fledged practising agricultural group among the Jainas that called for this construction of the divinely ordained (via the tīrthaṅkara Ṛṣabha) occupational segregation?

In a different context, and a different nature of study altogether, Karashima[166] shows that there existed private ownership of land in medieval Tamilnadu. He uses inscriptional evidence to show that there were increasing numbers of non brahmadēya lands in that period. "...Towards the end of the Choḷa rule, prominent non brāhmaṇa individuals held extensive plots of land, often covering more than one village (which is a) clear indication of a stratified society."[167] "There was a striking increase in number of individuals who held land in non brāhmaṇa (non brahmadēya) villages in the second half (of Choḷa rule, 1070 – 1279 AD)."[168] These individuals holding land may well have been, among others, the Jaina veḷḷāḷas In the chapter using inscriptional records one will also point out, in tandem with this hypothesis of Karashima's that this rings true in the

[164] Gurukkal, op.cit, pp.324-25

[165] Of course, the Jaina tradition is clear that these are not hereditary groups, as in the brahminical system, nor are they strictly hierarchical, unlike the varṇāśrama dharma. As Jaini puts it - "As for the castes they had no divine origin at all" according to the Digambara Jaina tradition as mentioned in Jinasenā's Ādipurāṇa.(Jaini, Padmanabh S. Jaini, Collected Papers on Jaina Studies (Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 2000), pp. 339-40

[166] Noboru Karashima, "Whispering of Inscriptions", in Kenneth R. Hall, ed, Structure and Society in Early South India: Essays in Honour of Noboru Karashima, OUP, Delhi, 2001 (pp.45-58)

[167] Ibid, p.46

[168] Ibid, p.45

case of the Tamil Jainas; and increasingly inscriptions mention donations by common people rather than kings and rulers (though they mention the names of ruling kings, giving us the regnal years and so on) to Jaina temples and paḷḷis by people owning land, or by rich individuals. But of course, there is no mention of the Jainas in the land-owning context even in Karashima's work.

Karashima points out, "The Choḷa nāṭṭārs were representatives of veḷḷāḷa landholders who lived in the ūrs (common villages classified as veḷḷānvagai) included in a nāḍu. As local leaders they controlled production in the nadu. Nāṭṭārs in the early Choḷa period seem to have held their land in common in villages. Though in the later Choḷa period many nāṭṭārs began to hold their land individually and privately, their communal character and organisation as veḷḷāḷa representatives, and also their solidarity as prestigious local leaders did not change. However, some non veḷḷāḷa nāṭṭārs or nāṭṭavars seem to have appeared during the 13th and 14th centuries, which resulted in the weakening of the previous communal ties and solidarity, Nāṭṭār prestige and power was also challenged by other upwardly mobile social communities including those of the artisans and merchants, whose wealth greatly increased during these centuries. Thus the dissolution of the old agricultural community became inevitable. The development of commerce and industry from the 13th century onwards is prominent in the Tamil inscriptions ....Development took place mainly in the north and south Arcot districts, which were formerly underdeveloped drylands, In contrast, Tanjavur district, which was previously the most advanced wet agricultural core seems to have been left out of this development since

there are a few inscriptions that document the growth of commerce in this area. ..." [169]

It must be pointed out here that the Jaina maṭha at Melcittamur (Ci ttamur in older references) near Cenji – the most important institution of Tamil Jainas that came up in the medieval times (around 15th century) was the largest land owning establishment; and today, too, manages a good enough proportion of land under cultivation. The tillers of the land, of course, were lower caste peasantry in the past, until increasing price of labour and the Jainas' own economic situation forced many of them to do their own ploughing, tilling and so on, as the community informs one. Also, quite a few migrated to cities and towns, especially the educated sections. And have given up agriculture altogether. Others have leased out their land – small and medium sized – to other cultivators, usually from other castes.

Returning to Gurukkal, where then, are these aspects of the Tamil agrarian context, in the discursive processes, apart from existing on the fringes, as merchants and artisans? Are they non-agents in a non-problematic way? Or so it would seem in the following statement – "What is perceptive about the discursive processes across the two social formations in early south India are : the breakdown of the heroic discourse along with the redistribute social relationships enchained by it; the dissemination of the Vedic, Purāṇic and Śāstric prescriptions as the dissonant impulses; enlargement of the dissonant impulses into the ethical postulates of didactic texts; reifications and discourse production within the hegemonic framework in response to the expanding agrarian

[169] Ibid, pp.49-50

relations of domination; emergence of bhakti as the mitigating force within the social contradictions of subjection and exploitation ; and their convergence into a new discourse."[170]

While a more or less general consensus exists on this process, which is the dominant process, need to look at the hidden, and subtle processes within this larger picture. What it does to discourses that are not within the brāhmiṇical paradigm, without the bhakti concept. What would the agrarian society be outside of this 'complete' picture? Does this make a 'complete picture'? And why so? Are communities such as the Jainas and Buddhists mute witness to the construction of this hegemonic discourse? Did they not counter these through literary traditions and in other ways of negotiating their inclusiveness? The concept of "nīr-pūciya nayiṉārs" may be seen as one such construct / concept symbolising this negotiation; but in that case, the community lost its distinct identity as Jaina to the larger dominant, Śaivite milieu. The –nīr-pūciya nayiṉārs' retained certain habits , like eating before dark, vegetarianism (as against other non Jaina veḷḷāḷa community), and some donated to Jaina establishments too (as is clear from the titles mentioned in some of the records, and to this day, there are Śaiva veḷḷāḷas who do visit Jaina temples, and donate). Even their houses bear symbols that the Jaina households have, with a difference – the swastika of the Jaina community is replaced by a Śaiva mark, of three parallel horizontal lines the way the Śaivas wear the sacred ash on their foreheads. Despite these 'visible' signs, even if the nīr-pūci nayiṉār story is considered a mythical construct, it still remains a very important construct in the narratives of the Tamil

170 Gurukkal, op.cit, p.334

Jainas as a mark of the persecution of the past. And a very important story of negotiations and of succumbing to the hegemonic.

But, at another level, there are certain 'non-negotiables', too, vis-à-vis other communities. Given the kind of strictures in their faith, the Jainas participated in only a certain kind of agriculture – not growing certain kinds of crops (tubers, etc). By its very nature, Jaina religion could not be very 'inclusive'; brāhmiṇical ritual practices asked for incorporating a variety of ingredients – most of which came to the temples through a complex web of redistributive mechanism. The redistributive network with the establishment of temples and endowments for brāhmiṇs as part of it, was not something the Jainas readily incorporated in their ways, despite their own temple, sangha and matha structures. Communities, and thereby practices that became part of the Purāṇic religion still remained outside the Jaina schema. [171]

Minimalistic (relatively) ritual paraphernalia – compare to the rich diversity of offerings allowed / expected from brāhmiṇical temples – also meant involving resource mobilisation from various places and also helped spread the brāhmiṇical ideology and establish the superiority of Sanskritic ritualism (as 'the way of doing things' [172]) in

[171] Returning to Murukaṉ worship – the way this hill-forest deity was made part of the Purāṇic family of gods – to this day the ritual of 'kāvaḍi', a very folk idiom associated with certain tribes in the Paḻani hills, easily got incorporated into the overall Murukaṉ worship pattern. The temple at Paḻani till date has most of its devout hailing from the tribal communities nearby, and communities such as these also practise sacrificial rites as part of their vows. Something the Jaina religion would obviously not be part of. A recent Chennai (the former government of Ms. Jayalalitha) judgment against animal sacrifices led to a wide debate on the question of caste and exclusion; with those speaking for the lower castes arguing against insensitivity of the judgment to practices of the lower castes / tribes. The vedic idea / metaphor of sacrifice did not figure in these debates.

[172] It is a strange phenomenon that to this day the ritual of breaking coconuts, and going through the brāhmiṇical rituals happens without questioning, even by political leaders who emerged from the discourse against caste and brāhmiṇism in Tamilnadu. This is the way in which the 'dominant'

tandem with local cultic practices. The Jaina temples with their own strictures may have appeared distancing at times and distant. Incidentally, lower castes were not allowed inside Jaina temples as well, though the religion essentially did not believe in caste. The Jainas inform that accepting the 'prasādam' (offerings made to the deity) is strictly prohibited in their temples. There is no concept of 'abhiśekam' (ritual bathing of the deity) with honey; milk is allowed on certain occasions. Camphor is avoided, so are flowers (to decorate the deity; since here the central figure – mūlavar – is the tīrthaṅkara, the one who has left all worldly possessions behind) These taboos would also mean a curb on transaction of resources of a certain kind between certain communities who were coerced / persuaded / inclined to be part of the brāhminịcal temple culture.

Related to this aspect one may return to the sacred centres of Murukaṉ worship which the text Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai [173] covered and helped build a sacred geography around the deity Murukaṉ-Subrahmaṇya. The six sacred shrines of Murukaṉ covering the traditional units of Toṇṭaimaṇṭalam (Chingleput, north and south Arcot districts); Pāṇṭiyamaṇṭalam (most of Madurai and Tinnevelly); and Chōḻamaṇṭalam (mainly Tanjavur) is a pointer to the fact that almost all the centres mentioned are located in and around the areas where there was concentration of agriculture, or conscious effort towards irrigated agriculture. Irrigated agriculture can be said to have received impetus right from the period of the Pallavas – c.550 to c. 850 / 900 AD when huge irrigation tanks and

becomes entrenched in everyday acts / events (subtly and imperceptibly at times), and what is everyday, re-instates the dominant.

[173] The following discussion from R. Uma Maheshwari, "Images of Murukaṉ: Perceptions of a Popular Deity and the Arupaṭaivītu in the Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai" MPhil dissertation (completed and submitted to JNU, New Delhi, under the guidance of Prof. Champakalakshmi), pp.70-71

other structures were set up "to store rainwater and runoff water for the paddy fields."[174] On the other hand, each of these centres is also located at points of convergence of different resources. The temple, as an institution, can be taken as pone of the major 'convergence' points where resources from forests, and hills, as well as agricultural produce were mobilised. Thus Palani, Tiruttani, Tirupparankunram, where Subrahmaṇya - Murukaṉ temples are located, would attract endowments of agricultural produce; sheep, milk etc from the pastoral tracts, honey, sandalwood, etc from the hills, to provide for the worship of the main deity or subsidiary deities...[175] It should be noted here that almost all the sacred centres that Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai writes about, were once associated with the Jainas, a fact proven by a number of epigraphical records coming from these places of early Jainism.

In the period between the 6th to 9th centuries AD, we see numerous roc-cut cave temples coming up coinciding with the height of the power of the Cāḷukyas of Vātāpi (Deccan), and Vengi (eastern coastal Andhra), the Pallavas of Kāñci and the Pāṇḍyas at Madurai. In the Tamil country, however, the caves and natural caverns usually by / on the hills, were associated with Jaina monks and nuns as early as 2nd century BC and the temples that were modelled here, date from 8th century AD. It is interesting to note that many of these hills that were formerly Jaina, with their cave shrines, became associated with Subrahmaṇya later. For instance, Kalugumalai, Kudumiyamalai, Kunnakkudi and Sittanavasal, where we have temples of Subrahmaṇya-Murukaṉ. Kalugumalai which has a Śiva temple, was a Jaina cave-

[174] Arun Bandyopadhyaya, Agrarian Economy of Tamilnadu: 1820 – 1855, Bagchi and Company, New Delhi, 1992, p.42
[175] Mphil dissertation cited above, p.71

resort, as the inscriptions discovered there (more than ninety of which are donative records) "refer to sculptures of Jaina figures – as tirumeni or Paṭimam."[176]

Most of the Tamil Jaina villages – barring a few of them in Tanjavur region (where a small section of Tamil Jainas are still resident) – were in the dry-land areas of the arid and (a few in the semi-arid) regions. The delta lands in the past (as records have shown) had almost entirely been reserved for brahmadēyas and agrahāras – the brāhmiṇ settlements. With the exception of Melcittamur (with the maṭha, established in the medieval period) maṭha having a substantial area of cultivable land; and perhaps in the earlier periods pre-bhakti, Jinakāñcipuram, near the present day Kancipuram, most Jaina villages comprise smaller landholdings. Most of them, almost all, non tank-fed, rainfall dependent areas of cultivation. The kinds of land grants that the inscriptional evidence reveals for Tamil Jainas (mostly, for Jaina temples) seem qualitatively different from brahmadeya or agrahara grants / charters. Few of them for instance, mention grant of nañcai (wet land) and 'puñcai' (dryland) together as part of the grant for offerings for the temple (most inscriptions also happen to be made by assemblies, or individuals, and not the royalty, per se) – that is, produce from both these kinds of lands to go to the temple as was the case in brāhmiṇ endowments.

So, in a larger context, domination is built around not merely rituals, but also a social stratification based on an entire system of land, control of land, resources, labour, land tenure, proximity to power, and all of it. Where the entire ritual complex – the dominant cultural idiom – is built

[176] A. Veluppillai, 'A Study of Tamil Jaina Inscriptions at Kaḷugumalai', in Asher, ed, Proceeds of the Second International Conference Seminar on Tamil Studies, Vol. 2, Madras, 1968, pp.416-421; p.421

around a certain kind of agrarian practice. For instance, paddy becomes the most important crop regime in this context. A certain agrarian rhythm evolves around this crop regime as well coinciding with festivals at times of harvest, and 'relief' from work on the lands. The agricultural cycle moves around ritual cycles – both sustaining each other, to the exclusion of other kinds of cropping patterns, practices, and beliefs and ritual patterns. For instance in the early Cañkam poetry, the crops associated with Murukaṉ worship – usually the velan veri-āṭal (a divination ritual) – was red millet, largely, besides other coarse grain. An entire redistributive network / structure thus established, by its very nature, marginalises other systems, related as it is with control over land, water, labour and religious dominance. [177] In this context, mention may be made also to the fact that the physiographic zones (the eco-types), the 'ain-tiṇai' (five tinais) concept known to early Tamils and the poetic (and geographic) basis for the Tamil Cañkam 'akam' poems of love also disappears with the consolidation of this hegemonic system. Literature – Tamil literature in general in this period - does not any more use these metaphors and motifs set against the eco types in later periods, post bhakti. Although this point does need further analysis, a casual perusal of the literary changes suggests this trend. It may be interesting to note this difference between early and medieval Tamil literature and the concept of eco zones as being the essentially Tamil spatial-regional context. It is thus important to look at these aspects of building up of

[177] One acknowledges gaining many insights on these 'other kinds' of dominance – namely, universal imposition of agricultural systems from one's own interactions with present day groups, organisations, and politics that is engaging with similar universal dominant understandings of nature of agriculture, imposition of newer kinds of agricultural regime across regions, negating regional environmental, cultural variations. While the realisation of a universal 'agrarian rhythm' happened during one's engagement with evolution of Murukaṉ into Subrahmaṇya, son of Siva, thanks to engaging discussions with Prof. Champakalakshmi, one realises that some patterns in history do keep recurring. This is one such.

hegemony and the conflict created thereby / therein, when one looks at / re constructs the history of the Tamil Jainas and to locate 'persecution' and responses thereof / thereby within these processes rather than focus on them being mere religious conflicts. The 'location' of persecution and dominance – marginalisation is, thus, these larger historical processes of different kinds happening at different levels.

The maṭham: its Significance

It is believed that the maṭham (one will use this Tamil term as used by the community) - maṭha – as an institution within the Jaina religion in south India came as a response to the almost militant propagation of Ādi Śaṅkara's times and his establishing maṭhas at different places across the country. However, there are differences of opinion on the time of its origin. "The Melcittamur matha was established in the 15th century (in the aftermath of the Vekatapathy Nayaka Jaina 'genocide')." [178] "Some believe that the Jaina maṭha here came as a response the mathas established by Ādi Śaṅkara in his time period. Around 8th – 9th century AD... One of the Jaina monks, in a proselytising mission set a senā maṭh at Delhi, Kolhapur, Jinakanci and Penugonda. In Tamilnadu it was known as the Lakṣmisēnā maṭha. There are five maṭhas in Karnataka – in Mudbidri, Śravaṇabeḷgoḷa, Hombuj, Karkāl, and Bastimaṭha (Narasimharājpur). Their maṭhātipatis are identified by the following titles – Chārukirti (Śravaṇabeḷgoḷa and Mudbidri), Dēvēndrakīrti (Hombuj), Lalitakīrti (Karkāl), and Lakshmisenā (Bastimaṭha – Narasimharājpur) and so on." [179]

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[178] Mallinatha Sastry, Tamilnadu kā Jain Itihās (Hindi), Kundakunda Bharati, Delhi, 1995; p.125. If such an exercise happened. One mentions this in terms of what the Jainas believe.

[179] Ibid, p.125-6

Padmanabh Jaini places the evolution of the class of 'clerics', the bhaṭṭārakas, within the evolution of 'popular' Jainism and the cult of yakṣa (and yakṣi) worship. He says, "(The) legitimisation of yakṣa worship within the Jaina faith may have helped to prevent the influence of Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva bhakti movements on the Jaina laity. All doctrinal compromises have their price, and Jaina laypeople, who previously had only worshipped the Jinas, were increasingly attracted to the worldly benefits available from the yakṣas, while the mendicants busied themselves with the task of devising new rites, litanies, tantric practices to placate the yakṣas...." [180] And this, "resulted in a new class of clerics, called the Yatis and Bhaṭṭārakas, hitherto unknown to Jaina society, who claimed for themselves a special status similar to that of the 'mahants' of Hindu religious establishments. Several centres, called Maṭhas, of such administrative clerics, came into existence all over Western India, and from these the clerics conducted an extraordinary number of business transactions, such as building temples and erecting images, both of the Jinas and of yakṣas. They also instituted various new rites and rituals to be employed in their worship and managed large endowments offered by devout laymen for the perpetuation of their cults..." [181]

Sangave writes, "(The) Institution of bhaṭṭāraka (was) started by Digambara Jainas as a measure against their continuous religious and social disintegration during the medieval period....system of bhaṭṭāraka was constituted mainly for religious divisions of society like sangha, gaṇa, gaccha." [182] And about the maṭham at Melcittāmūr - "A high

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[180] Padmanabh S. Jaini, "Is there Popular Jainism"(pp.2267 -279); p.275

[181] Ibid, p.275-6

[182] Vilas Adinath Sangave, Jaina Community: A Social Survey, Popular Prakashan, Mumbai, 1980 edition (first published in 1959); p.317

priest at Sittamur in S. Arcot district elected by representatives from the chief Jaina villages. The high priest has supreme authority over all Jainas south of Madras but not those of Mysore or south Kanara with whom the former have no relations.....(he) settles caste disputes, and fines and excommunicates the erring...(and his) control over the people (is) very real."[183]

"The Jinakāñci maṭha at Cittāmūr was established by Vīrasenācārya who was also its first maṭhātipati....Mackenzie visited the Cittāmūr maṭha in the year 1816 in the time of (the chief pontiff) Muṇibhadradevācārya who was also known as trividyācakravarti...The role of the maṭhātipati is to supervise the Jaina community and religion, by overseeing the protection of the temples, manuscripts, and so forth." [184]

"The maṭhātipati is the representative of the religion. Meant to protect the āgamas. He is the mediator between people and the ācāryas. This maṭha was originally at Tiruparuttikuṉṟam. In order to save our āgamas the maṭha was shifted to Cittāmūr."[185]

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[183] Ibid, p.101

[184] Krishnamurthy, Ceñjip Pakutiyil Camaṇam (Tamil), Sekar Patippakam, 1994; pp.102-103

[185] Svasti Śrī Lakṣmi Senā Paṭṭāraka Pattācārya Mahāsvāmi, Jinakāñci Maṭham, Melcittāmūr (Cenji), personal communication.
Maṭhātipatis at Citamūr maṭham from 1925 onwards - Chakravarti Svamigal (Agalur); Samudravijayan Svamigal (Agalur); Chandanakirti Svamigal (Erumbur);Sripalavarni Svamigal (Tachur);Chakravarti Svamigal (Tanjavur);Veerakumar (very short term, Uppuvelur); Somakirti Svamigal (Erumbur); Adichakravarti Svamigal (Ponnur); Bharatan (short term, Agalur); Appandairajan (Maliayanur) – Source: Sukumara Panditar, teacher, Melcittamur, October 18th'03, personal communication. Incidentally, the mathatipati wears saffron robes, not originally the colour associated with Jainism.

The maṭhātipati is recognisable by his saffron robes, head gear, the kamaṇḍalam and peacock feathers (cāmara) that he carries along. The maṭhātipati – at the maṭham at Cittāmūr which was in the past known as Siṅgapuri / Siṅgapurināṭu, and was part of Toṇṭaimaṇṭalam and later Cholamaṇṭalam – bears the honorific 'Svasti śrī Lakṣmī Senā Paṭṭāraka Pattācārya Mahāsvāmi' of the Jinakāñci, Penugonda, Catursiddha Simhāsana. He is held as the 'simhāsanātīśvara' of these four maṭhas, according to the community. He is the ritual head of the Tamil Jaina community and responsible for the maintenance, upkeep of the Jaina temples, manuscripts (the Cittāmūr maṭham has a collection of palm leaf manuscripts, which Mackenzie is said to have referred to when he came here, in 1816) across the state of Tamilnadu, and initiate new entrants into Jainism. But the difference between the acaryas of the 'pīṭhas' (set up by Śaṅkara) and the Jaina maṭhātipati is that he is elected by responsible people from Tamil Jaina villages. The maṭhatipati at the Cittāmūr maṭham is elected by representatives of the villages of Tayanur, Viranamur, Cittamur, Vilukkam, Peramandur, Alagramam and Velur (all in Tindivanam taluk), and all from south Arcot district alone. Perhaps one of the reasons as to why other Jaina villages are not involved in this whole process has to do with the fact that this was the region that found it important in medieval periods to counter the medieval trend of persecution that the community refers to? The question needs to be probed further and nothing conclusive may be said about the reasons in the present study. Also, one needs to question as to why it took so long for the matham to be shifted out from Jinakāñcipuram – that is, between the period of the bhakti and following Śaṅkara's missionary zeal and the 15th century – to Cittāmūr.

Meanwhile, the Tamil Jaina community, on eth whole, shows respect and veneration for those among them who live the life of a 'true' Jaina – in each village there are few who observe the strictures of their faith with utmost dedication while there are others who do tend to relax a little, especially those employed, travelling long distances or those in situations that need some 'adjustments' on their part. But in terms of eating, and drinking boiled, filtered water, they all observe strict discipline.

Speaking of 'adjustments' / 'negotiations', the Jainas found a way within their doctrine, in their Śrāvakācāras, to address these. For instance, their qualification of 'violence' itself.

"From a householder's context violence has been divided into four categories, viz.: -

Sañkalpa himsā (intentional violence) – injury committed intentionally by mind, speech and body known as violence of head, heart and hand. It is totally prohibited; and meant to protect all living beings

Udyoga himsā (professional violence) – injury happening unavoidably in the permissible professions and business.

Ārambha himsā (household violence) – injury which happens unavoidably in the performance of various worldly duties and rituals.

Virodhi himsā (protective or retaliate violence) - injury happening unavoidably in meeting the aggression in defence of one's person and property and in protection of others.

To be absolutely non-violent is difficult..."[186]

These qualifications come immediately as a response (from the community) to questions on their current practice of agriculture using pesticides and so on. Incidentally, the maṭhātipati at Cittamur has recently initiated a process to go back to organic farming and non chemical agriculture, and trying to sensitise other agriculturists in the area about possibilities of minimising violence. Few of the Tamil Jaina agriculturists feel absolved of the guilt of using chemical based farming, on the ground that they do not till their own lands and have others do it for them. But for most of them, it is what they call "udyoga himsā" and is unavoidable.[187] And with those that follow the rules most religiously, the community raises them to a pedestal. At Tirupparambur, for instance, the community remembers the three householders who undertook the sallekhana vratam (death by starvation) referring to their birth as the 'avatarittār' (they were not simply 'born', piṟantavar'; but avatāras). These three form part of this 'immediate history' and the three elders have been commemorated in footprints incised on stone in a maṇṭapam built in the village. This bit of the recent past is as important for the Tamil Jainas of the village as their ancient past linked to the beautiful temple at Karandai which was part of Tirupparambur and is now a separate village, very close by. While the former is the history of the laity and a very 'Jaina' history (reminiscent of the ācāryas of the past who took sallekhana, in the Tamil land, besides a few śrāvakas) the latter is the history associated with state

[186] B.K.Bansal, "Non violence – Precepts and Practice", in Śruta Kevali, Vol 7, No . 3, January 2003, Sri Srutakevali Bhadrabahu Swami Sevadal, Kundakundanagar, Tamilnadu.

[187] However there are those that are known to have been so strict about rules - like an old woman in Cittamur who refused to take allopathic medicines when she was severely ill. People give tremendous respect to those like her.

patronage and a history of the Jainas in Tami<u>l</u>akam in a larger context of political and social history. It also points to the people's own narratives of their community's history – one is to do with the larger Jaina mythology and another more with specific associations with Tami<u>l</u>akam, their homeland and home-village.

Changes in Practices

With Sanskritism becoming overwhelming, we find, gradually, by medieval times, Jaina rituals too start adapting to this change. There was evidently an effort to retain the community identity against the Vedic, Purāṇic (Śaiva and Śākta) influences which necessitated this change. Significantly, there is a shift from Prakrit to Sanskrit at some stage, perhaps closely following brāhmiṇical ritualism.

At the temple at Karandai one found the following śloka to Saraswati in a booklet given as sastradanam by a devotee. It read – *"śrī candrārka kōṭitojvala divyamūrte śrī candrakākalitanirmale suprahavāsē kāmārtadēsē kālahaṁsa samādirūḍe vāgīśvari pratidinam mama rakṣadēvī..."*

At another place, the invocation to yakṣa Brahmadeva follows the format of Gaṇesa aṣṭōtra. It reads –
"ōm hrīm jaya siddha prasiddhaye namah
ōm hrīm jagadēka vīrāye namah
asurakula santapāya namah
anta nāyakāya namah
riddhi vināyakāya namah
airāvata priyāya namah..."

The yakṣi Jvālāmalini too has her stotra (Jvālāmalini Sadāṣṭaka stotram) which again starts with *"ōm hrīm am*

krōm, hrīm śrīm, anēkānanda mūrtayai namah, ōm hrīm....kāmavidhvaṁsinyai namah...śārvaṇyai namah....jagadāmbikāyai namah..mahādurgyai namah..."[188]

There are places where Jaina epithets are used such as "*jinarāja padāmbōja ...pañcakalyānaka nāyakāyai namah...*" and so forth.

An overarching Sanskrit ritual tradition is consolidated in these developments engulfing even anti ritualistic (initially) doctrines such as Jainism and Buddhism. Dēvi stuti is used in worship of the yakṣi in Jaina temples. At the same time there is an introduction of the worship of navagrahas (the nine planets). Debate still persists among the Jainas as to the validity of the same. Some of these issues will be touched upon in the section on narratives of the community. Interestingly, many of the Tamil Jaina Śrāvakas (illaṟattār) believe Sanskrit to be a language of their canon rather than Prakrit and quite a few lament the loss of the knowledge of Samskrutam. In this context – "the Digambara Jainas of Karnataka region used Sanskrit in their writings probably form the time of the earliest penetration of Jainism into the area in the early centuries of the Common Era. For parts of Karnataka, Jainism was the vehicle by which the North Indian Brāhmiṇic Sanskrit tradition was introduced...The 7th through 10th centuries C.E saw the flourishing of a Jaina Sanskrit literature, and Jaina Purāṇas were some of the more important works composed. The Ādi Purāṇa was also popular among the medieval Digambaras of North India and Western India..."[189]

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[188] Śaśana Deva Deviyar Pūjā Vitānam (Tamil) compiled by Mallinaatha Jain Sastri, Chennai

[189] John E. Cort, "And Overview of the Jaina Purāṇas" in Wendy Doniger, ed, Purāna Perennis: Reciprocity and Transformation in Hindu and Jaina Texts, SUNY, Albany, 1993 (pp.185 – 206); End-note . 26

However, the ācāryas of Tamilnadu seem to have used Tamil more than, or as much as, Sanskrit (and Prakrit) as textual instruments of propagation. Perhaps a longer and more consistent tradition of Tamil existed in Tamiḻakam which may be cited as a reason for the Jainas today feeling 'left-out' , or 'ignorant of' the Sanskrit tradition. This perhaps also explains the ultimate relation of Tamil Jaina identity with Tamil literature, language – a feature that distinguishes them in great measure from the Jainas in Karnataka, or elsewhere.

On Sanskrit operating as a language in the Karnataka Jaina context, Jaini avers, "The Digambara Jainas of the Karnataka region used Sanskrit in their writings probably from the time of the earliest penetrations of Jainism into the area in the early centuries of the Common Era. For parts of Karnataka, Jainism was the vehicle by which the North Indian Brāhmaṇic Sanskrit tradition was introduced. Jaina mendicants and laity were influential in the courts of the Gaṅga, Rāshṭrakūṭa, and Hoysala dynasties. Many of these royalty were strong patrons of the Jainas, and occasionally Jaina themselves. For several centuries Jainism and culture were nearly synonymous. The seventh through tenth centuries CE saw the flourishing of a Jaina Sanskrit literature, and Jaina Purāṇas were some of the more important works composed. The Ādi Purāṇa was also popular among the medieval Digambaras of North India and western India." [190]

Perhaps in the case of Tamiḻakam the Jainas' extensive use of Tamil (and a little later, Prakrit) in secular and sacred

[190] Padmanabh S.Jaini, "A Purāṇic Counter Tradition" in Wendy Doniger, ed, Purana Perennis: Reciprocity and Transformation in Hindu and Jaina Texts, SUNY, Albany, 1993; note.26; p.281

textual tradition predated that of Sanskrit. And in some ways, the former developed to a greater extent than the latter; and with the popularisation of Jinasenā's Ādipurāṇa Sanskrit too got introduced at some levels into the Tamil Jaina sacred literature context. And perhaps came with its own typical association of being a language of the learned. And which may explain to a certain extent the Tamil Jainas lamenting the loss of Sanskrit in what had changed for them in so many years as a community. However, this is a conjecture and not a conclusive statement on the use of Sanskrit in Tamil Jaina context; and needs further study.

Jagdishchandra Jain writes,"Jinasenā II (different from Jinasenā I, author of Harivaṁsapurāṇa) the pupil of Vīrasenā, the author of the Dhavaḷa-ṭīkā, on the Śatkhaṇḍāgama, began composing the Ādipurāṇa during the reign of king Amōghavarśa, but died without completing it in 848 AD. In his Ādipurāṇa he has laid down six-fold sets of practices for a layman: worship (ijya), an acceptable profession (vārtta), charity (dāna), study if scriptures (svādhyāya), restrain (samyama) and austerities (tapa)....Somadeva, contemporary of Jinasenā II, a Digambara Jain, in his Upāsakādhyāyana (which forms the last three chapters of the Yaśastilaka-campu) deals with conduct of Jaina laymen.... largely influenced by brāhmiṇic rituals....Somadeva, in his 34th chapter, prescribed ācamana (sipping water from the palm of the hand), hōma (oblation to gods casting clarified butter into fire), bhūta bali (offerings to all created beings), actually not commanded by the Jains . ...The 35th chapter ...lays down that 8 evil planets such as sūrya, śukra, etc, should be propitiated....There are details of 6 types of pūjā....These ...are not compatible with other Jain authors (on pūjā).... (Between) the 9th and 12th centuries AD, (there are) numerous compendiums prescribing

the code of conduct for laymen (in Sanskrit) by Amṛtacandra (Puruśārtha-siddhyupaya)....Padmanandi (Pañcaviṁśatīkā), Vīranandi (Acārasāra..)." [191]

Further, "Jinasenā II composed Jina sahasra nāma stotra, 1000 names of the Jina, calling him Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Buddha, Bṛhaspati, Indra, and so on. Ṛṣabha is called the Creator of the Universe (jagatam sṛṣṭa), Vāmadeva (Śiva) of tawny colour (piśāṅga) [Ādipurāṇa, 14, 26, 27, 37, 44, 47, 51; ch.40] Jinasenā also accepted the importance of saṁskāra (sacred ceremony which purifies from the taint of sin contracted in the womb and leading to regeneration) beginning from conception to death. He believes in sacrificial rites (yajña)...and refers to thread ceremony to be adopted by Jains (yajñōpavīta)..." [192]

Padmanabh Jaini beleives that, "The waves of the bhakti movement that had swept over the whole range of Indian life finally overtook the atheist Jains and forced them to deify, as it were, their human tīrthaṅkaras or face the peril of extinction. Probably the move brought to the surface the emotional hunger of the Jain laity for an object of worship more gracious and glamorous than merely the austere figure of an exalted human teacher. Jinasena very skillfully provided the Jain laity with a new identity of a specially honoured caste of 'neo-Brāhmaṇs' , a new book of codes in the guise of his Purāṇa, and a new image of the Jina endowed with a grandeur and majesty that could easily compete with the Hindu trinity. To be sure, the tīrthaṅkaras, like the Buddha of the Pāli canon, had always been

[191] Jagdishchandra Jain, Studies in Early Jainism (selected research articles): "Jain Worship:a Critical view" (pp.172-180), Navrang, New Delhi, 1992.; (p.175-6)

[192] Ibid, (pp/177-8)

surrounded by heavenly attendants like Indra and Kubera who made special appearances on the five great occasions like the kalyāṇakas...."[193]

Elsewhere he gives the reasons for these developments - One became a Jaina by taking refuge in a Jina (spiritual victor), a mendicant who had completely overcome all forms of attachment (rāga), aversion (dvēśa), and delusion (moha), and was therefore worthy of worship. But the Jainas were surrounded by a vast majority of people whose deities, although armed with weapons and surrounded by spouses, nevertheless promised their devotees both salvation as well as daily bread and butter (yōgakṣēmam vahāmyaham, as Kṛṣṇa says in the Gitā). Combating the influence of thee Vedic and Purāṇic deities became an urgent preoccupation with the Jaina mendicant of medieval times. .... (But) despite the tremendous social and emotional pressures that the medieval bhakti movements must have exerted, no cult of Śiva or Viṣṇu ever developed within Jainism. Nevertheless, Jaina teachers rejected only Śiva's ability to lead people to salvation; they accepted his existence as a minor god, and according to one account even used him to promote their own religion. Ācārya Hēmacandra is reported by his Jaina biographers to have converted the Śaivite king Kumārapāla (1143-72) by showing him a vision of Lord Śiva and obtaining from the latter a declaration that the religion of the Jina was superior to all. The king is said to have assumed at that very moment a life-long vow of vegetarianism, the hallmark of Jainism. ...."[194]

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[193] Padmanabh S. Jaini, "Jina Ṛṣabha as an Avatāra of Viṣṇu", Collected Papers on Jaina Studies, (pp.325 – 349), Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 2000; p.344

[194] Jaini, "Is there Popular Jainism" (pp.267 -279), Ibid, (p.269-70)

On the question of Yakṣas and Yakṣis, Jaini says, "The ancient Jaina texts are silent on the status of the yakṣas within their religious fraternity....In contrast by the post Gupta period we begin to find images of the Jains flanked by figures of guardian deities. ...It appears quite certain that the Jain teachers of the early medieval period undertook the task of purging these non Jaina admixtures from the lives of the Jaina laymen.....Jinasenā, who is credited with formulating a large number of Jaina householder rites, stipulates that a person upholding the true Jaina faith should remove images of the 'false gods' (mithyā devata) from his residence. Such a statement would indicate that the laity of Jinasenā's time were prone to worship non Jaina gods, and that a movement to reconvert these Jainas gained strength under the leadership of the Jaina monks.....It was during this time that Jaina teachers decided to institute a cult of guardian deities closely associated with that of the Jinas."[195] (And) "Once the worship of such exalted householders had been legitimised, the establishment of a popular cult of guardian deities opened the way for further assimilation of non Jaina elements. Thus, certain well known Hindu gods and goddesses, who were already associated with sacred places adjacent to the sites of Jaina temples, could be incorporated into the Jaina fold."[196]

This did not seem to have happened, however, in the case of the cult of Murukaṉ, or any of his attributes, or associate deities (Iḍumbaṉ, for instance), considering that most of his worship centres had Jaina associations at some point. [197]

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[195] Ibid, p.272-3
[196] Ibid, p.275
[197] Interestingly, some of the Tamil Jainas told me the Paḷani – anti (as Murukaṉ is also referred to) may have been a Jaina tīrthaṅkara icon later converted, and given a spear and other associations. This one has no corroboration however in the process of development of the cult of Murukaṉ. But one needs to place the perspective of the community that has seen other temples and shrines converted.

Talking of the incorporation of Ambicā as Nemināṭha tīrthaṅkara's guardian deity, Jaini points out, "The Girnar Hills in Saurashtra, famous for the inscriptions of Aśoka and Rudradāman, are sacred to Jainas and non Jainas alike. The highest peak of this mount is dedicated to a Hindu mother-goddess named Ambikā, and a nearby peak is sacred to the Jainas who believe it was the site at which Nemi, the 22nd Jina, attained nirvāṇa. Although there is no story connecting Ambikā, (also called Kūṣmāṇḍini) into Nemi's guardian deity. Similarly other yakṣas especially Kāḷi, Jvālāmālini, Mahākāli and Gauri, whose names definitely suggest connections with the Śaivite deity Durgā, may have been brought into the Jaina pantheon as guardian deities of the Jinas – Suvidhi, Śītala, Śreyāmsa and Vāsupūjya (9 to 12 tīrthaṅkaras) respectively. Jaina laymen could then worship them as their own deities without abandoning the Jaina faith."[198]

However, one has discussed one of the stories about Ambicā and her becoming the guardian deity of Nemi, in the study on Nīlakeci the Jaina Tamil text.

Tamil Jainas have also adopted practices that seem brahminical in their marriage rites. But there are also other popular elements in these. For instance, "The Jainas match horoscopes of the bride and groom before marriage. The girl's approval and interest in the man she is about to marry is given the top priority. After tying of the tāḷi the bride is supposed to offer worship the eight nāgas (snakes) – ananta, vāsuki, tatca, janaka, kuṇikā, tuvassa, karkōṭaka and caṅka

[198] Jaini, op.cit, p.275

(the eight snakes that the Jainas worship) – in order to protect her from any pain / injury from snakes. Then the bride and groom put nava dhānyam into water..."[199]

Paul Dundas writes, "According to Ādipurāṇa Jainism possesses all the significant components of Hinduism: the Veda, the purāṇas, the law books, correct social behaviour, ritual, mantras, deities, ascetic accoutrements (linga) and rules about proper types of food, but the main difference is that Ṛṣabha has promulgated all these elements in accordance with the principle of non violence." [200]

Regional Identity: Problematising the Concept

Speaking of identity of the Tamil Jainas, the distinctness of the regional (Tamil) tradition marking regional (and at times, intra-regional, local) identities have often been negated or disregarded at different times in history. In a sense, back in the early centuries of Christian era, brāhmiṇical religious ideology and discourse sought to build linkages between regional and a universal monolithic system through myths that tied up local cults to figures of a larger family of gods / goddesses; the gotras too helped brāhmiṇs in different regions to feel considerably linked to a common hoary past of the great sages; even as they constructed myths of civilising, settling, or building new areas. The Agastya myth is one such example for the Tamil country.

The Jaina origin stories hardly take recourse to such 'civilising' and 'universalising' mission their religion. Their

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[199] Krishnamurthy, Ceñjip Pakutiyil Camaṇam (Tamil), Sekar Patippakam, 1994, p. 29

[200] Paul Dundas, "The Digambara Warrior", Michael Carrithers, Caroline Humphrey, eds, The Assembly of Listeners: Jains in Society, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991 (pp.169 – 186); p.185

tīrthankaras would never be seen as those who alighted on some land outside of their own accorded / recorded spheres of activity – between their birth, omniscience and nirvāṇa. Thus one would never find a place made sacred in the Tamil country on account of some such visitation of a divinity. But, yes, ācāryas, monks and nuns from the land do give a place its importance in the regional Jaina history. For instance, the place where Mērumantarapurāṇam was composed or the site where Kundakundācārya sat in meditation, or where monks attained mokṣam after sallekhana at a certain rock shelter. Thus there is no obvious inherent compulsive nor any visible conscious effort perceptible among Tamil Jainas to relate necessarily to the universal pan-Jaina identity in ways other than by following the '*mummaṇikaḷ*' (tri-ratna – *nallaṟam, naloḻukkam, nanñānam*) and other precepts expounded in Jainism, such as non killing (koḷḷāmai), vegetarianism (ūṇ uṉṉāmai), and do forth. There seems no apparent history of settling / civilising lands and peoples through recourse to mythology to prove a universal larger 'connection' so to speak, to Jainas living elsewhere; or o the śalākāpuruṣas (the 63 of the Jaina cosmogony). Perhaps due to this we do not see the rise of local cult figures within the pre-given pan-Jaina (universal) schema; and one of the reasons may also be the emphasis on the concept of karma and individual effort towards salvation.

As Jaini argues, "Despite social and emotional pressures that the medieval bhakti movements must have exerted, no cult of Śiva or Viṣṇu ever developed within Jainism...(whereas) nevertheless, Jaina teachers rejected only Śiva's ability to lead people to salvation; they accepted his existence as a

minor god..."[201] Yet, this could only be said for the universal Jaina doctrine. Not for the way each region devised its own local identity within this history. And in our own case, it is in Tamil that a regional Jaina identity can be said to have been forged.

The development and consolidation of a regional identity itself is an interesting phenomenon that has only recently become an important theoretical exercise engaging the academic community. Speaking of the 'regional', Kunal Chakravarti points out, in his very intense monograph on the Bengal Purāṇas, "An important criterion for the formation of regional identity is the development of the literary language of a region. Adherence to a particular language by a group of people is unmistakably a cultural statement, and it is in language that 'perceived cultural space and instituted political space coincide'....The evolution of a literary language and a corpus of literature particular to a region must have contributed to a heightened awareness of cultural homogeneity among the people of (a) region."[202] Further, in the case of the Bengal Purāṇas, "Regional identity is only one among many such overlapping identities, and even within it the linguistic or the cultural factor may receive priority depending on which one offers access to opportunities or is perceived as threatened at a particular point of time. ...Consciousness of distinction among the participants of a common religious culture is an important constituent in the formation of the identity of a region, and in Bengal this consciousness contributed as much to the crystallization of its regional identity as the consciousness

[201] Padmanabh Jaini, "Is there a Popular Jainism?", in M.Carrithers, C. Humphrey eds, The Assembly of Listeners: Jains in Society, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991; pp. 187-200; p.190

[202] Kunal Chakrabarti, Religious Process: The Purāṇas and the Making of a Regional Tradition, Oxford University Press, Delhi 2001; p.297

of a common language which began to take over as the prime index of regional identity from the medieval world."[203]

Speaking of development / use of the language of the region with which the Jaina teachers engaged, Jaini comments, "Kannada was the most important of the vernacular languages for Jaina Purāṇic composition, and in turn Jaina authors were instrumental in the development of Kannada as a literary language. The "Three Gems" of Kannada literature, Pampa, Poṇṇa and Raṇṇa were all Jainas who wrote less than a century after the great Karnataka Sanskrit author Jinasenā. But whereas Jinasenā and his disciple Guṇabhadra were both mendicants, the Kannada authors were householders. The development of Jaina literature in the vernacular seems to have been a process similar to the development of Hindu literature in vernaculars such as Bengal, Hindi, Oriya, and Telugu. In both cases, educated laity wrote in a language accessible to the broader populace, in reaction to the elite, non mother languages used by the religious professionals."[204]

There can be other ways of looking at 'region' as a concept as well. For instance, "Geographers commonly recognise that, in terms of the basis for their recognition, all regions may be classified as instituted, denoted, or naively given. Instituted regions are "instituted by human agency as distinctive and discrete units limiting the areal extent of operation of certain functions." (Hartshorne 1965: 619), and are generally administrative in nature. Denoted regions are created primarily for the purpose of organising and analysing information, while the naively given region is "recognised as a meaningful territorial entity by the people

[203] Ibid, p.313

[204] Padmanabh S.Jaini, "A Purāṇic Counter Tradition" in Wendy Doniger, op.cit, note. 22; p. 281

who live there and / or by other people to whom it is of some concern." (Schwartzberg 1967:89-90)....naively given regions ...have their origins in people's perceptions, in their mental ordering of the world around them... (and) may be considered subjective."[205]

In the Tamil Jaina case, being in Tamiḻakam is a given, a priori, while their perception of themselves as a community could be conceptually understood within the framework of a "naively given region." This would give one the scope of comprehending the live dynamics of a community's relationship with the environment it lives in, engages with; rather than study just one aspect of the community, namely, Jainism (as the only marker, in the universal Jain-ism sense) in Tamilnadu, this modern notion of the state, then being the "instituted" idea. In the latter case, there is no concern with what happens within the community, but only concern with what others (royalty, bhakti bards, etc) did to the community.

However, there might be a third angle to it whereby the community perceives of itself in both the "instituted" when it came to their village and its place in Tamil Jaina history. For the purposes of a historian looking at these concepts ("instituted", "denoted", "naively given" regions) inscriptional records, for instance, in this case, would not point to these dynamics and live interactions. But stories, narratives, changes within those, might. In this context one is reminded of a point made by Gananath Obeyesekere[206] in his brilliant monograph on the cult of Goddess Pattini. He

[205] Deryck O. Lodrick, "Rajasthan as a Region: Myth or Reality?" in Karine Schomer, Joan L. Erdman, Deryck O. Lodrick, Lloyd I. Rudolph, eds, The Idea of Rajasthan: Explorations in Regional Identity, Vol I, 'Constructions', Manohar, American Institute of Indian Studies, Delhi, 1994 (pp. 1-44); p.3. I thank Prof. Kunal Chakravarti for introducing me to this reference, and thereby, aspect, of the 'region'.
[206] Gananath Obeyesekere, The Cult of the Goddess Pattini, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1984

says, "Historiography that relies exclusively on well-documented and incontrovertible historical evidence such as from inscriptions must surely be wrong since it assumes that the recorded data must be the significant data shaping history, transforming institutions of people." [207] But of course, like Lodrick later points out, ""Conceptualisation of regions and the emergence of regional identities reflect processes involving complex historical, cultural and social forces working in a particular geographic setting over lengthy periods of time...." [208]

However, distinctions between Jainas being a far-cry, for a long time, and in many circumstances, the Jainas were clubbed under the category "Hindu" as has been noted. Speaking of how this category is applied in legal matters, Duncan Derrett [209] points out, "For the purposes of the application of the codified parts of the personal law, a Hindu is one who is not a Muslim, Parsi, Christian or Jew! The earlier case law held a person to be a 'Hindu' for the purpose of application of Hindu Law even if he renounced all religion, renounced idols, renounced the Brahminical trinity of gods...Sikhs and Jainas, whatever they themselves think of their relationship to Hindus, are 'Hindus' for legal purposes..." [210] Further, "Section 2 (C) of the Hindu Marriage Act applies to (besides other categories) any person who is a convert or reconvert to the Hindu, Buddhist, Jaina or Sikh religion." [211] The Jainas have been contending with this legal history that affects their sense of identity as a community distinct from the 'Hindu' since many years now.

[207] Ibid, p. 605
[208] Lodrick, op. cit, p. 34
[209] J. Duncan M. Derrett, Religion, Law and State in India, OUP, Delhi, 1999 (originally published by Faber & Faber in 1968)
[210] Ibid, p.52
[211] Ibid, p.52

"As Jains came to the law courts, commissions were issued from time to time all over the country to take evidence and ascertain Jain law and usage as it existed in Jain Sastras and was prevalent in practice. The first such attempt was in 1833 when Maharaja v. Govindnath Ray Gulabchand and others (5 select representatives , SDA Calcutta 276) Mr. Walpole of the Presidency Saddar Court directed the Murshidabad judge to obtain an exposition of the Jain shastras on certain points from some important Yatis (priests).This decision of the Presidency Court recognised the broad distinction between the tenets and usages of the members of the Jain sect and the rest of the Hindu community and the right of the former to an adjudication of matters in dispute regarding questions of inheritance by their own shastas."[212] "But they found a real difficulty in discovering Jain Law and laboured under an incorrect notion that the Jains were Hindu dissenters that in the absence of special customs being proved to the contrary the principles of Hindu Law applied to them. ....The courts had to fall back on the return of commissions, and the method of commissions was necessarily imperfect and inadequate commissions were issued as cases came to court."[213]

"In 1899, in the Harnath Prasad vs Mandil Prasad (27 Cal 379) the homogeneity of the Jains was recognised as evidence of existence of the same custom among Jainas of

[212] M.C. Jain, "Jaina Law and Law Courts", Jaina Gazette, Vol XXVIII, Nos. 5, 6, 7, 1930 / 31(pp. 163-165); p.163. One discovered the above journal at the Prakrit Bhavan, at Dhavalateertha, near Sravanabelgola. Which also houses the National Institute of Prakrit Studies and Research. I thank the staff for helping with accessing the books, and treating one to special cups of tea once in a while! One is using most of what is mentioned here, to bring to notice an aspect of the Jaina community's history which has recurred in different points, namely, the onus on the community to explain their independent status. In terms of colonial history, interestingly, while the colonial rulers were sending census officials and others to record the existence of different communities and while they were aware of the existence of Buddhists and Jainas as distinct religious sects in India, this 'awareness' did not inform the colonial legal system.

[213] Ibid, p.164

other places, and that there was no material difference in the customs of Agarwala, Chorewal, Khandelwal and Oswal sect of Jains. But Jain Law did not make much headway with the courts of law in India, till in an able and courageous judgment in 1915, Mr. Jagmander Lal of the Indore High Court (original Suit No. 3 of 1914) emphasised the independent origin of the Jaina community and discussed the value of a few old Jain Law books. This judgment did not go unnoticed in British India."[214]

M.C. Jain further makes a note of a statement made in the wake of a case at the Madras High Court which had apparent empathy for the issue that Jainas are indeed different from the Hindus. 'Kumaraswamy Shastri, officiating Chief Justice in a recent Madras case, Galeppa vs Eramma (AIR 1927 Madras 228) (noted) " I would be inclined to hold that modern researchers have shown that Jains are not Hindu dissenters but that Jainism had an origin and history long anterior to the smritis and commentaries which are recognised authorities on Hindu Law and usage.... In fact Jainism rejects the authority of Vedas which form the bedrock of Hinduism and denies the efficacy of the various ceremonies which Hindus consider essential....No doubt by long association with the Hindus who form the bulk of the population, Jainism has assimilated several of the customs and ceremonial practices of the Hindus but this is no ground for applying Hindu Law as developed by Vignaneswara and other commentators, several centuries after Jainism was a distinct and separate religion with its own religious ceremonial and legal systems, en bloc to Jains and throwing on them the onus of showing that they are not bound by the law as laid down by Jain law givers...' This then is the

[214] Ibid, p.164

position of Jain Law in British India at present. And there the matter rests. It now rests with Their Lordships, of the Privy Council to give effect to the feelings expressed by Hon'ble Mr. Justice Kumaraswami Shastri of the Madras High Court."[215]

One may now move over to a different side of the distinctness and identity as a community looking at itself over a period of time in history; and what it makes of its identity in relation to the larger social context. I refer here to an interesting piece of information found, again, in the journal Jaina Gazette of the same period (1931). It is as follows –

"During the pratishtha mahotsav at Venbakkam near Conjeevaram a big meeting of Jains was held on 30-6-1931 under the distinguished presidency of His Holiness Sri Lakshmisena Bhattaraka Bhattacharaya Svamiji. Messrs Brahmasuri Sastri of Sravanabelgola, C. Vasupala Nainor of Arni and Bhadrabahu Sastri of Nahal delivered learned lectures on Jainism. The following resolutions were proposed by Sikhamani Sastri of Tirumalai and unanimously passed.

1. To Pray to the Government <u>to reserve at least 2 seats for the Jains in the council and the local boards</u>
2. To request the Government to include Jains in the list <u>of backward classes</u>
3. To request the persons nominated by His Holiness to form a deputation to wait on the Ministers
4. To organise a Fund under the control of His Holiness for the amelioration of the Jains. H.H was pleased to nominate messrs. C.S. Mallinath ji of Madras T.A.

[215] Ibid, p.165

Sridhara Nainor of Madras, C. Vasupala Nainor of Arni, V.A. Chandhranath Nainor of Melmalaiyanur and Bhadrabahu Sastriar of Nahal as members of the deputation."[216]

Incidentally, this Mallinath ji mentioned above was the Editor of the journal, Jaina Gazette

It is interesting that the note mentioned right at the beginning of this chapter, written in the year 2002, seems to make a similar appeal so far as including the 'Samanar' (Tamil Jainas) in the Minorities List (if not in the backward classes list). This goes to say that over so many years, the subject of identity as a distinct social group seeking affirmative interference of the State remains very important for the Tamil Jainas and somewhere un-addressed. Un-addressed mainly on account of perceptions of the community as being part of a larger "instituted region" kind of sense - a pre-given – and that is reinstated by historical writings that do not address the question of identity and construction of identity while writing of the history of Jainism in Tamiḻakam.[217]

Texts and Identity

Speaking of Tamil Jainas and their textual tradition, texts such as Toḷkāppiyam, Kuṟaḷ, Cilappatikāram,

[216] "A Jaina meeting at Venbakkam", (a Notice, no author mentioned), Jain Gazette Vol. XXVII, Nos. 7 and 8, July and August, Madras (1931); p.172. Emphasis, wherever, mine.

[217] And this happens perhaps because of the insistence on using "strong evidence" – read as inscriptional records, grants, temples, etc – if one were to address Jainism as an "ancient" historian; or on the other side, if one were talking of the community, there are examples of dissertations (I found one, in Madras University) which speak of what the Jainas eat, drink, how they marry, and so on – information 'collected' in the traditional purely archaic anthropological manner. There must be a way of bridging this gap between traditional history writing and so called anthropological writing to look across historical time at sources that reveal so much about community identities that no royal charter, nor traditional anthropological exercise can. The sources one has found, and used, one hopes, would be understood to be 'historical' sources especially while engaging with a living (minority) community such as the Tamil Jainas, with a long historical presence in Tamiḻakam.

Cīvakacintāmaṇi, Valayāpati, Cūlāmaṇi, Nālaṭiyār, Palamoḻinānūṟu, Ēlāti, Araneṟiccāram, Yaśodara Kāvyam, are among the various works authored by Jainas. In most of his writings T.S. Sripal mentions that the northern term 'sramaṇa' and the Tamil term 'tuṟavor' (one who has given up all possessions) are conceptually similar. He also talks of a 'Tamil' tradition as against a 'northern' (vaṭa moḻi – northern language). The Tamil Jainas, incidentally, hold Sripal in high esteem, as he was a champion for opposing animal sacrifices in temples in Tamilnadu and inspired legislation to this effect in the Madras Legislative Assembly. One will get back to discussion on Sripal in a little while, essentially since he was deeply involved in highlighting, through his many writings, and lectures, the Tamil Jaina literature and textual tradition and Tamil Jaina (or Jaina Tamil) identity in the period between the 1920s till well up to the 70s.

A new consciousness is visible in reviving the antiquity of Tamil Jaina; and Jaina connection with Tamilnadu since 2nd., 3rd century BC. Directly addressing the past in historical times – an attempt being made in the modern period. The Tamil Jainas are known to visit the sites of antiquity (roc-cut caves and natural caverns around Madurai, Ramanathapuram, Pudukkottai, etc) individually.

In this context, it is significant that the Tamil Jaina sacred geography exists and operates at three levels –

a. in the north (places such as Pavapuri, Sammetasikhara, Urjayantagiri, and so forth) where tirthankaras attained nirvana or Sravanabelgola, site of the Gommateswara monolith;

b. the hills and caverns across Tamilnadu where inscriptions have also been found and;

c. temples, hills and sacred centres within a certain distance from / or in, villages inhabited by them. In the last case, people from certain villages visit certain sacred centres close to their villages, or centres they have had a habit of visiting since generations. But during certain festivals few sites find the entire Tamil Jaina community congregating – the 'tēr' (the ritual chariot) at Melcittamur; the 'naṟkātci' at Tirunarungondai (Tirnaruṉkuṉṟam); or the 'tēr' at Tiruparuttikunram, etc.

The universal sacred geography concerns the Jaina cosmogony largely, and the rest are sites that have a historical association with historical visits paid by monks, and nuns; or places they have composed literature, or are believed to have composed literature. Their tirtha / pilgrimage is thus to be seen at these three levels of operation. Each year, many of them also go to the sacred centres of the 'larger', pan-Jaina cosmogony in groups. But strangely enough, they do not make such trips – in such a massive planned manner – to rock-cut caves and natural caverns spread across Tamilnadu. When asked they say, they go there from individual interest in a historical site.

Returning to the subject of reviving the identity issue, Jeevabandhu Sripal, and A. Chakravarti[218] are two important figures in the Tamil Jaina (contemporary) history. The

[218] Although my first introduction to Chakravarti was from finding his book Neelakesi at the Sahitya Academy library in Delhi – which also introduced me to Nīli-Nīlakeci – every village of Tamil Jainas I have been to, referred me to Chakravarti's books. It meant a lot for them if I had read the book Nīlakeci; but it meant a lot more for me to read his other works, which someone or the other in one or the other village / town / city referred, or commanded me to 'must-read'. An ardent fan of Chakravarti nainar, Anantharaj 'Jain', has installed a stone bust of Chakravarti's outside the Cittamur maṭham. Similar is the case with Jeevabandhu Sripal. Every place one visited gave me new information about him, urging me to read his writings. I owe this understanding (however limited) of the Tamil Jainas and a renewed building of Tamil Jaina consciousness to all the Tamil Jainas I have had the fortune to meet. Including the grandson of Chakravarti nainar, Sri. Jaya Vijayan at Chennai and their extended family in Chennai and Tindivanam.
In a sense, my own engagement with the question of Tamil Jaina identity got substantiation in my introduction to Sripal and his works. In a sense, it all felt like a story asking to be written.

former, a social activist with a reformist, and nationalist zeal; and the latter, an educationist, philosopher. But both of them greatly into writing and publishing. Both represent a generation that worked tirelessly and consistently to trace, monitor, and highlight the history of Jainism in Tamilnadu, and the Tamil Jaina literature. Both were inspired by the national movement, and one of them even participated in it actively while also earning respect and support from the Tamil socio-political movements, such as E.Ve Ramaswamy Periyar, Tiru. Vi. Kalayanasudaram Mudaliyar, Kamaraj, Karunanidhi, etc at different points in time.

The Jainas, writes John Cort, at the "broadest level...situate themselves within their distinctive universal history, defined in terms of their current location on the ever-revolving wheel of time, and their being in the immediate shadow of the 24 tīrthankaras or Jainas of this time period and this continent."[219] And then, they "also situate themselves within detailed histories at a more localised level, what I call localised histories....The localised histories usually involve important foundational individuals, more often monks but also frequently laymen..." [220] It is then, in this localised history of the Tamil Jainas that one places Sripal and his consistent efforts at monitoring the historical status of Jainas and Jainism in Tamilnadu. One of the criticisms that Jaini made about western scholarship (through time) on Jainism (which one may also extend to Indian scholarship to a large extent, at least in the present case) was "the lack of attention to...the sect of Digambaras, who have been neglected almost completely in favour of the Śvetāmbaras...and the sociology of Jainism, which, in

[219] John E. Cort, "Genres of Jain History", in Journal of Indian Philosophy, vol. 23, No. 4, December 1995 (pp.469 -503); p.473
[220] Ibid, p.473

comparison with even the most minor of the Indian religions and cults, has not been studied to any sufficient extent."[221] In one's own way, one is trying to address these criticisms through the present study on Tamil Jainas as a community.

T. S. Sripal in fact organised numerous public debates and discourses in Chennai and across Tamilnadu (also included recitation of Civakacintamani) spreading the notion of community pride and consciousness among any contemporary Tamil Jainas. He appears to have encouraged many young orators and scholars in Tamil Jaina literature, something quite a few educated Tamil Jainas today vouch for. One of the people he encouraged was 'Cintāmaṇi Nāvalar' Santhakumar Jain of Mottur, who made a name for himself as the best orator of Cīvakacintāmaṇi (and perhaps today the only living exponent of this recitation).[222]

It is not incidental that among the group of Tamil Jainas who are struggling today to put in place a Jaina resource centre near Vandavāsi – including the head of the Tamil Samaṇa Peroḻi at Vandavasi, Aravali, and many others – are those inspired by (and who almost swear by) the work of T.S. Sripal.

Sripal was born on 5th July 1900 at Tirupparambur (10 miles from Kancipuram). He used to run a free library at the village, called Darumasagara Svamigal Free Reading Room at the Karandai temple there. The library had both secular and sacred literature, including copies of the paper Swadesamitram. He was a Congress worker during the

[221] Padmanabh Jaini, "The Jainas and the Western Scholar" in Jaini, ed. Collected Papers on Jaina Studies, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 2000, p.27

[222] Santhakumar Jain shared this information with me personally. He had met Sripal when he was a young man (now he is in his late seventies) and was impressed by a speech that Sripal gave on Cīvakacintāmaṇi which inspired him to read the text and devote his life to reciting it.

freedom struggle. A Gandhian, he studied at Kancipuram. From 1919 onwards he stayed and worked at his village. [223] Apparently, he brought eminent people to his village for Congress propaganda during the independence movement in those days. An interesting anecdote from his life involves his work during imprisonment of Gandhi at some point. Sripal used to take out procession with Gandhi's photographs through the villages. He was questioned and ordered not to take out procession at the time of Gandhi's imprisonment. "Sripal took out the procession with a mridangam and his associates – 10 friends – with a harmonium. When the Sub Inspector objected, the group squatted right there and continued playing the mridangam and harmonium." [224] Between 1925 and 1927 he worked as a school teacher in the Panchayat Board High School in Nalli. He started the recitation of texts such as Cīvakacintāmaṇi, Merumantarapurāṇam, with references and allusions to Nālaṭiyār, Kamba Rāmāyaṇam and so on.[225]

Around 1927, Sripal joined the South Indian Humanitarian League, a group initiated as the South Indian Jeeva Rakshaka Prachara Sabhai, by All India Congress Committee President Srinivasa Iyengar in 1926 at Sowcarpet in Chennai in the presence of a Jaina monk. As part of the South Indian Humanitarian League (SIHL, henceforth) Sripal conducted sustained campaign against animal sacrifices in temples through lectures, pamphlets, posters, and so forth. At the same time he associated himself with E. V. Ramaswamy

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[223] Ka. Ci Tanakkoti Mohan Sundiran, Jeevabandhu T. S. Sripal Avarkaḷin Vāḻkaiyum Toṇḍum (Tamil), Vardhamana Patippakam, Chennai, 1959. In fact I saw interesting books on / by Karl Marx, Lenin, Subramanya Bharati, among others, there when I went to the reading room in Karandai. I was told no one reads these; some are preserved in good shape by the elders there. But they inform that want of an organised fund of is a severe limitation.

[224] Ibid, p.47-8

[225] Ibid, p.49

Periyar and his Cuya Mariyatai Iyakkam (Self Respect Movement) around 1920s and also contributed essays to Periyar's newsletter Kuṭi Aṟasu. Around the same time he had set up the Dharumasagar Reading Room in Karandai. From late 1920s he conducted campaigns across Tamilnadu against animal sacrifice. He even sat on a fast at Tiruvottiyur temple. He was given the title Jeevabandhu on Mahavira Jayanti in April 1943.

Interestingly, a report in English daily The Hindu dated 28th July 1937 under the heading - "Buffalo sacrifice given up at Palaymcotta temple festival" (Tinnevelly) mentions the mails sent to Sripal by Gandhi and Nehru.

"As a sequel to the agitation carried on by T.S. Sripal, the buffalo sacrifice in connection with the tenth day festival of the Ayirattamman temple at Palayamcottah was given up today. As has been already reported in these columns there has been for sometime past a campaign against this sacrifice. Gandhiji sent a message stating that "sacrifice of animals in the name of religion is remnant of barbarism". And Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru wrote, "I am grieved to learn that it is proposed to offer animal sacrifice in temples. I think that such sacrifices are barbarous and they degrade the name of religion. I trust that the authorities of the temple will pay heed to the sentiments of cultured people in this matter and refrain from such sacrifices."[226]

To other newspaper reports may also be mentioned here in this connection - in The Hindu, and Times of India. As follows –

[226] Ibid, pp.91-92

The Hindu (14th August 1939)

"Under the auspices of the Young Men's Progressive League, Mr. Sripal of the South India Humanitarian League spoke yesterday on "Animal Sacrifice". Mr. B.S. Murthy, Parliamentary Secretary to Government, presided. ...The Chairman in his concluding remarks assured the gathering that the government would do everything it could, to further their interests and advised them to continue to carry on propaganda against cruelty to animals. A resolution was then passed condemning animal sacrifice and requesting the Government to adopt legislative measures to put an end to it."[227]

Sunday Times April 26th, 1942

Animal Sacrifices in Temples stopped at many places

"The fifteenth annual report of the South Indian Humanitarian League Madras makes impressive reading. Started fifteen years ago, the League aims to completely eradicating animal sacrifice from our country. It fights for complete prohibition and strives to ameliorate the condition of the depressed class. Last year, the League succeeded in stopping animal sacrifices at various temples. This they did by lectures and distribution of leaflets. The League is to be congratulated for this good work, they are doing and it deserves the encouragement and help from all who regard animal sacrifice and drink as evils." [228]

In 1947 November, Chennai Upper House introduced the Animal Sacrifice Abolition Bill and on 21st January 1949 it was made a Law. Sripal's efforts in this, along with support from leaders in the Congress and others, were instrumental in the intervention of the state in the issue.

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[227] Ibid, pp.99-100

[228] Ibid, p.190

The Animal Sacrifice Issue and Interpretations

Interesting to note in this connection, is a debate that ensued over the Former Chief Minister Jayalalithaa instructing fine and severe penalty over those that violated the ban on animal sacrifices in temples in the year 2003. The debate saw opinions of various kinds from intellectuals, dalit activists, and it was a time one was interacting with the Tamil Jainas. It was interesting to capture their opinion on this renewed state effort to ban an activity that they saw as the fruits of T. S. Sripal's labour in the first place. The Tamil Jaina involvement in the initial state action against sacrifices was the most important issue for them. In this context one wishes to cite an article by M.S. S. Pandian [229] written in that time, addressing the issue from a time that we are talking about just now - a time when Sripal joined the Humanitarian League. In this article there are points that one will locate the Tamil Jaina identity in, something that is missed entirely again, in Pandian's paper. Because, again, it looks at the 'dominant', to critique the dominant viewpoint.

In 2003 August Jayalalithaa, the then Chief Minister of Tamilnadu, had commanded strict enforcement of the ban on animal sacrifices on being informed of a sacrificial ritual involving killing of 500 buffaloes in a village temple. While some praised her for bringing into force the long forgotten law, and others praised her without quite knowing the law had been put in place in 1949, many among the academic

[229] M S S Pandian, "Dilemmas of Public Reason: Secularism and Religious Violence in Contemporary India", in Economic and Political Weekly, May 28-June 4, 2005 (sourced from the web edition of EPW)

circles in Tamilnadu wrote interesting opinions on the issue. The debate ranged from linking her new-found zeal to negation of dalits' identity and ritual context to saying it signified the Hindu Right's attempt to grant state sanction to 'brahminical Hinduism'. Sadly, though, it had been forgotten in the whole debate that Vedic ritualism on which brahminism is based had itself been central to the idea of animal sacrifice in rituals. And in course of time, influenced by religions such as Buddhism and Jainism, besides other socio-cultural changes over time, brahminism and vegetarianism somewhere began to be seen as linked. Or so it seemed from most of the opinions generated by the move of the state government.

In this context Pandian (besides other interesting articles n newspapers) gave a different kind of historical perspective to the whole debate in the article mentioned here. He saw in this move a past that we are here concerned with. And which will bring us to some very crucial points about Tamil Jaina community, the nir puci nayinar stories, the Śaiva veḷḷāḷars and the whole movement of addressing the animal sacrifice ritual in temples. Pandian writes, "Following the formation of the South Indian Jeevarakshina Sabha, a Jain organisation, in Madras in 1926, there were active campaigns to stop animal sacrifices in temples in the Tamil-speaking areas. The Jains were actively supported by the Saivites. For instance, Thiru Vi Kalyanasundara Mudaliar, a Saivite and an ardent nationalist, used his journal Navasakthi to oppose animal sacrifice. There were joint meetings organised by the Jains, Saivites and the rationalists to campaign against animal sacrifice These joint campaigns by rationalists and

religionists produced a vast corpus of literature on why animal sacrifice had to be stopped..."[230]

Pandian's engagement with this legislation starts from the Śaivite veḷḷālas some of who were prominent in the debate. The Jainas – who were missing even in the assembly debates on the Bill, as one shall note – are missing even in his analysis. Apart from mention of Sripal, in context of who were talking on the issue in the late 30s, there is little else. It may have been interesting to locate even communities such as the Jainas in the discourse to see differences within the discourse. But since even scholars working on 'Jainism in Tamilnadu' have never addressed the Jainas as part of these modern movements and discourses, one cannot expect this perspective from Pandian, locating as he does, the discourse in a totally different paradigm. That of emerging modern Tamil consciousness and the way it perceived ritual practices, and thereby, communities, in Tamilnadu.

Thus, he believes, "In order to understand how animal sacrifice was represented in the Śaivite public discourse, Maraimalai Adigal (1876-1950), a versatile scholar of Tamil and Śaivism and an important public figure in colonial Tamil Nadu. Here I shall primarily focus on one of his key texts, *Veḷḷāḻar Nāgarīgam* (Veḷḷāḷar civilisation), which was first published in 1923. (One will come back to Maraimalai Adigal's teleology later) ...Characterising hunting and nomadic material cultures, he noted, "Before knowing [the techniques of] cultivation and the ways of using them, people lived in great difficulty without enough food and

[230] M.S.S. Pandian, op.cit, page number not mentioned (web edition). It may be noted here that the association Pandian refers to here, according to Tanakkoti Mohan Sundiran (cf.cit) was started by a Congress-man – as mentioned earlier – in the presence of a Jaina monk, and was not originally, a "Jain organisation" as Pandian refers to it. But yes, people such as Tiru.Vi.Ka, actively supported the same. Tiru.Vi.Ka, we have noted, also supported the Jainas in their claim to authorship of certain Tamil textual traditions.

proper clothing... One can directly observe even today the difficult state in which the hill people and the forest dwellers lead an uncivilised life of hunting."[15] However, such an uncivilised regime full of scarcity, economic hardships and other debilitating qualities of life, drew to a close as the Veḷḷāḷars (upper caste, non-brāhmiṇ Śaivites) discovered modes of settled agriculture:.. This was indeed a critically important move for Maraimalai Adigal. The recently schematised *Śaiva Siddhanta* (philosophy of Śaivism), which to him was the highest achievement of the Tamil mind,[18] had as one of its central tenets non-killing (read vegetarianism),[19] and hence the claim to compassion and munificence. Thus, Adigal's sequencing of Tamil history developed an identity between the Veḷḷāḷars, their traditional occupation of settled agriculture and Śaivism as the civilisational apotheosis of history.... Within his sequencing of history, the Āryan brāhmiṇs had remained in a state of barbarism in the past while the Veḷḷāḷars were building a civilisation based on settled agriculture... In keeping with their uncivilised status, the religious-moral universe of the Āryan brāhmiṇs had also remained unrefined. They worshipped 'minor' deities such as Varuṇa and Indira, offered them inebriating drinks, and persisted in "the performance of bloody sacrifices so much so that as time went on, their conduct became more and more revolting to the delicate feelings of the humanitarian Veḷḷāḷars."...The Tamil Jains who campaigned for the ban on animal sacrifices in temples, also shared such an understanding about the deities of popular Hinduism. He, however, insisted, "It is essential that those who follow the Śaivite moral of non-meat-eating should mix only with others who also follow the same moral. If they have to mix with meat-eaters...they should do so only after converting them to Śaivism..." In September 1950, the Madras legislative assembly debated a

bill to abolish the sacrifice of animals and birds in Hindu temples. The bill was a result of a long-standing and sustained campaign against animal sacrifice in temples by the Tamil Jains led by T S Sripal and had the open support of the then chief minister of the Madras state O P Ramaswami Reddiyar, a follower of Vadalur Ramalinga Adigal who preached non-killing as part of his Śaivism. Whatever be the sources of their definitions of Hinduism, a section of the legislators was categorical that animal and bird sacrifices could not have been or be part of true Hinduism..."[231]

Thus, non killing or vegetarianism, which was essentially a Jaina tenet – which is why the Jainas were involved in the whole campaign – seems to have been missed out as a Jaina tenet, and is called a universal 'Hinduism'. This is an interesting aspect of the debate, excerpts of which may be noted here, as referred to by Pandian. Either that the debate in the Assembly had nothing to do with Jaina part of the campaign against animal sacrifices (it has become a Śaiva Veḷḷāḷar campaign) or is it that it does not come to notice of Pandian while referring to the debate, since he too, is seeing this through the Śaiva Veḷḷāḷa discourse?

"For example, V I Muniswami Pillay claimed, "I do not think that according to the Hindu religion there can exist such kinds of offerings for the worship which involves cruelty to animals and birds... I think it is high time that these small blemishes that are a blot on Hindu religion should be removed... The second ground on which arguments for the ban of animal sacrifice was advanced, was secular. K Brahmanandam Reddy, for example, claimed, "...this usage or custom in the country is a remnant of barbarism and it is

[231] Pandian, aforementioned. No page numbers mentioned

a heinous sin too, but this country is ignorant and superstitious, and as such perhaps be not a religious thing but a superstitious matter" ... Several of the legislators, independent of the ground on which they justified the ban, assumed a pastoral role towards those lesser beings who sacrificed animals and birds. Assuming a civilising role, they discounted penal action but sought education and propaganda as the means to make the law effective.... The Madras Animals and Birds Sacrifice Prohibition Act 1950, despite its penal provisions and the euphoric response from the legislators, failed to stop the practice of sacrifice in temples of popular Hinduism. ..."[232]

Then Pandian moves on to other ways of perceiving religion and engaging with religion. Though this part of his engagement is not linked to the present scope of my study, I may just quote a point or two that he makes. Which brings us to the point as to where Jaina religion failed to make that connection with certain castes (precisely on this ground) and where Purāṇic religion 'adjusted' itself to allow for these practices, even if on the fringes as it were. But the significant point is, if Vedic religion inhered the practice of animal sacrifice (that is, towards seeking benefits of whatever kind) and Buddhism and Jainism essentially were born as a counter to these practices, the same practices in contemporary context, have come to signify the cultural expressions of the marginalised (dalits, tribal communities), sanitised, as it were, of the Vedic antecedents, as it were. Where, in this process, do religions such as Buddhism and Jainism figure? That is, if we talk of addressing this process towards theoretical understanding alone. It remains within the parameters of a 'universal Hinduism' (read brāhminism, read thence, vegetarianism) that critiques too, are

[232] Ibid.

formulated. And this is where one has to locate the question of community and identities in the contemporary context.

So, Pandian, writes, "Significantly, animal sacrifice has an important role in forging community links. Though dalits are not allowed to enter a number of caste Hindu-controlled temples in southern Tamil Nadu, they are allowed to offer sacrifices. The Sudalai temple at Seevalaperi belongs to the yadhava community but the dalits are allowed to make sacrifices during temple festivals. The head of every goat sacrificed goes to the thevar community. This practice is also prevalent in Sudalai Maadasamy temple at Arumugamangalam, Saastha Malai temple at Marukaalthalai, Oththappanai Sudalai Andavar temples at Vijayanarayanam and Sirumalanji, Kallaththiyaan and Saasta temples at Naduvakurichi. Though the Sirumalanji Oththappanai Sudalai Andavar temple is controlled by the nadars, the first sacrificial goat is to be offered by a dalit and all animals are later sacrificed by a barber. My point, however, is that animal sacrifice as a mode of worship is saturated with a network of significations ranging from remedying worldly afflictions, to mark life-cycle transitions, to reproducing community links and hierarchies. And the language of reform anchored in notions of culture, is, for most part, so reductive that it is incapable of comprehending and engaging with these web of sacral significations which are important for communities, families and individuals. The narrative of culture as progress cannot but be impatient with such significations...."[233]

There is perhaps need to 'seek' the 'secular' and the 'religious' outside of the "Hindu" discourse altogether. Religion, in this sense, seems to be equated with "Hindu"

[233] Ibid

and hence the problem; hence one of the ways is to counter the dominant paradigm looking at these issues from discourse that became marginal – the Jaina discourse on non violence, for instance. Jainism is only one example. There was also the materialist school or the ajivika sect, with its own perceptions on cultural form and processes. If those histories are also retrieved, in a contemporary debate of the above kind, it could give refreshing insights. Nevertheless, in that moment of the former CM. Jayalalalithaa's sudden interest in the Act, Pandian's reflected few of the most comprehensive, analytical and truly historicised arguments of the discourse on animal sacrifice.

Maraimalai Atikal has been critiqued at various points by Sripal (in his miscellaneous writings especially on Maraimalai Atikal's hypothesis on veḷḷālas in Veḷḷāḷar Nagarigam referred to by Pandian. For the Tamil Jainas he represents the 'nīr-pūci veḷḷāḷar' of their story of the converted Jainas. Sripal writes in one of his books that in the 7th – 8th centuries AD the vaṇikar and veḷḷāḷar communities converted to Saiva faith but these were earlier Jainas. They smeared sacred ash on their foreheads and are till date vegetarian. [234]

Identity / Markers

*T*he suffix 'Jain' was not used by the Tamil Jaina community (we have mentioned the caste names they retained) until recent times. Non Jainas in the village identify them as 'nayiṉār' (in almost all cases in the village context, no one responds to the term Jainas, if one were to ask for directions to the Jaina settlements; the term used is nayiṉār) . The suffix 'Jain' which few of them have begun to use in official

[234] T. S. Sripal, Iḷankovaṭikal Samayam Yātu, Parry Nilayam, Chennai, 1957, p.31

documents , one figures, comes from an increasing need to associate with the pan-Indian, pan-Jaina identity, since they are in a minority and are realising it. At the same time, they hold fast to their Tamil identity. There were few among them who used both suffixes, 'Nayiṉār Jain' after their names. But within the Jain fold, they are quick to distinguish themselves as Tamil, with certain customs that they consciously practise in the knowledge that these are not part of the 'north' (vaṭaku / vaṭanāṭu) Indian Jaina culture. The need to use the suffix Jain, perhaps, also signifies a community's response to the domination (culturally, symbolically, socially) of the purāṇic, brāhmiṇical Hindusim, which continues, even in contemporary times, to subsume (or, in a 'softer' term, or claims to 'incorporate') all kinds of local hitherto marginal cults and practices in its fold. There is also the inherent need to distinguish themselves from the category 'Hindu'.[235]

Persecution as a Concept: the Issues, History

The 'persecution' that most scholarship on Jainism in Tamilnadu has mentioned, is not to be seen merely in the blatantly violent suppression (the oft-mentioned example of impaling of 8,000 Jaina munis on stakes, celebrated in the ritual at Madurai Mīnākṣi temple) but also in its subtler sustained sense, wherein a minority persecuted community begins to adopt certain practices of the dominant religion / culture, thereby 'giving in' to the social pressures in order to survive. Forced to introduce what, in essence, was never

[235] Though not related to this point in particular, and though this point needs further study and substantiation, while Jainas in the north (especially Rajasthan, Gujarat) have tended to show allegiance to the Hindu Right in politics, the Tamil Jainas (based on one's interaction with them) almost totally reject the Hindu Right when it came to voting. And this comes from their consciousness of the Hindu Right representing (rightfully) the Vedic brāhmiṇism, and by extension the Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava persecution they were subjected to, and their past links with the Dravidian movement precisely to state their opposition to brahmin ascendancy; and Śaivite appropriation of their textual tradition and Tamil language, broadly. This point, however, needs further working on; and is based on conversations one has had with them in the course of field visits; and reading some of their works on literary appropriation, etc.

part of their cultural ethos. This kind of understanding of persecution lays stress on what the ideology and power of hegemony and violence of a more subtle / hidden nature can do; and also looks at community's own internal response to external circumstances rather than just begin and end at a more 'visible' single-instance of a wave of violent fundamentalist attack on a section of population.

It also means that the forces that bring about such responses (from within the community) do not always come in 'hoards' in a single visible combat; and also looks at the way hegemony is constructed and sustained through a power structure that protects the interests of the dominant. It also shows the successful means by which a singular system (here the purāṇic, 'syncretic', led by the brāhmiṇ – bhakti group alliance) has the power to convince people of its 'efficacy' and need in their everyday lives. [236]

Adoption of certain practices of a system that becomes dominant (and by extension, unfortunately, 'normative') may also be seen in another sense. As the non dominant cultural system becoming victims of a hegemonic tradition and changing their basic essence. In this latter sense, one would perceive the inclusion of Sanskritic slokas for the yakṣis (in

[236] Thinking on these lines began to form from the moment we were students witnessing the Babri Masjid-Ram mandir controversy and all that has followed since. Need to look at these processes was strengthened when one researched Murukaṉ and his evolution into Subrahmaṇya and looking at Jaina centres gradually transformed into Śaivite (whether forcibly, or by 'force of conviction' and the promise of a better system, one does not wish to go into – but certainly something that became dominant); or at records of Buddhist temples changed into Vaiṣṇava or Śaiva shrines. Such attempts continue in contemporary times and one may not overlook these in writing histories of pasts that somewhere do 'link up'. In certain adivasi villages in Andhra Pradesh, one can now find several small shrines of Hanuman, Rāma and Sitā, a very recent addition to their cultural landscape. The RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh of the Hindutva Right 'brigade') activists spent some years convincing the adivasis of their role in the Ramayana and the fight to win Sitā back. Would this (if the RSS angle were to be removed) at some point be seen as the incorporation of the local into a larger overarching 'Hindu' cultural complex, or a process of building hegemony or consensual hegemony? There seems a tendency to perceive 'incorporation' of local cults, practices as building a syncretic, pluralistic Hindu culture. What were the origins? And were they always non problematic is the question.

the format of the Devi stuti), or rituals such as 'kumkuma arcanai' or navagraha worship in some Jaina temples.

There are two ways of looking at this – one, that there was a 'willing acceptance' of certain traditions that gained popularity (by whatever means). This would also be a more convenient way of perceiving these changes. On the other hand, it can be analysed as a problematic. For, what becomes 'popular' over a period of time[237] is itself rooted in a context where multiple forces operate – power, ideology, dominance and tradition. The state, brahminism as a dominant paradigm, Sanskritism, may be seen to comprise this multi-pronged complex of forces. Through dalliance with power temple religion construct, helped by bhakti (which initially seemed to include those elements that were excluded in Vedic brāhmiṇism) was able to intrude into the 'popular' (in the true sense) spaces and establish the 'superior' way of doing things – conducting rituals, offering worship, communing with the god, and so on. Thus, 'bhakti' too , was established as the only true medium of this communion and folk deities found themselves a place in this 'superior' scheme through slokas composed with their names, but essentially invoking the all powerful god / goddess of the Purāṇic construct.

So also, Murukaṉ reaches across Tamilnadu as Subrahmaṇya-, son of Śiva – Pārvati, brother of Gaṇeśa and has elaborate rituals performed by brāhmiṇ priests to a rooted shrine in contrast t the minimalist (Cañkam period) moving god-concept where the diviner invited god into her / him by performing the velan-atal in a space specially prepared for that coming of the god (perhaps goddess too).The frenzied shamanistic dance may still find a place in Murukaṉ worship,

[237] In fact 'popular' itself cannot be used as a 'redeeming' concept; and may not always be representative of the marginal, the 'folk' layers – somethings can also be 'made popular' through means that may hardly be inclusive, democratic.

but has to live on the fringes, outside the temple precincts (if one observed carefully) of a god who, until then, was capable of entering their 'low-caste' bodies. It is this non physical, but equally powerful, violence of dominance and hegemony that one would urge to bring to attention. And this is what must be seen as persecution - the fact that today the Tamil Jainas are around thirty thousand or thereabouts in numbers; that there is a layer of stories of impaling of Jaina monks, a sacralised Tevāram tradition (still sung) that abuses the Jainas; a ritual or two that symbolically abuse the Jainas (still conducted); the nīr pūci (Śaiva) veḷḷāḷar story (even if it is taken as a metaphor), the persecution at the hands of the Nāyaka ruler (again ardent Vīra Śaiva follower) – all these prove some kind of suppression of a community which was violent if violence may not always be seen as physical.

Thus, "Many Jainas ...observe Hindu festivals...In the south the Jaina bhaṭṭārakas seem to play the same role of caste gurus played by similar figures in Hinduism. Hindu terms, forms of thought, and indeed, ideas of caste and varna seem to have permeated much of Jaina literature...In the south there is a caste of temple priests which has been designated, perhaps justly, as 'Jain Brāhmaṇs' [238], while in the north Brāhmaṇs proper sometimes act as priests to local Jain societies." [239] "...On all these grounds ...it can be adequately explained by ideas of Hinduism and caste already available to us (that) Jainas are not a separate community." [240] And may be in these blurred lines exists the fact of negotiations.

[238] Based on interactions with the community of Tamil Jainas, though, the term used for temple priests is 'arcaka' and not 'brāhmaṇa'; the arcakas are considered of lower rank in social hierarchy; they do not marry into non arcaka families, but do marry people from the 'seṭh' (non Tamil Jaina) families as informed by one of the arcakas. There are no special privileges though the maṭham looks after their monetary needs.

[239] M.Carrithers and C.Humphrey, "Jainas as a Community" in Carrithers and Humphrey eds, The Assembly of Listeners: Jains in Society, Cambridge university Press, Cambridge, 1991, p.8

[240] Ibid, p.9

While the Jainas may have well adopted certain practices over a period of time as a result of mutual transactions with other communities, too at the same time, one must remember that these transactions seem to have favoured, in the long run, only certain sections and certain communities. So much so that casteism and 'majority fundamentalism' [241] are concepts of this dominant culture that refuse to be resolved till date. These are facts that manage to silence many alternative systems and practices. Hence, if the Jainas accept a status quo position over caste – in that their outlook towards lower castes remains more or les similar to that of the brāhmiṇs in many senses – it shows the level of penetration of the dominant ideology in 'alternative' systems, such as Jainism and Buddhism. Hence while one may speak of specificities for the Jaina social context and maintaining distinctness wherever possible, it is still a question as to how and why certain practices do become part of their everyday.

In this connection, as Carrithers and Humphrey put it, "it is true, for example, that some Jainas have adopted the sacred thread, but their use of it is quite contrary to its use among Hindus. Jainas, like Hindus, take vows and fast, but their way of doing so is unmistakably Jain." [242]But at the same time, these may be perceived as the ultimate survival of the dominant patterns which formed the basis of these 'variants' and interpretations – though culture and community-specific. They remain, at the end of it all, 'interpretations' and not the essence of the 'original' tradition that came out in opposition of these practices.

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[241] To use a 'modern' terminology with the understanding that the concept may not be 'modern' and has been in existence over a long period of time.

[242] M. Carrithers, Humphrey, op.cit, p.9. For the Tamil Jainas the punul, sacred thread represents adherence to the ratna-trayam, mummanikal, the three gems of Jaina ethic - right faith, conduct and knowledge.

To resolve these tricky questions is not one's aim here. But resolutions seem to be readily available in the community's own narratives and discourses. The Jainas believe that many of these concepts – the yaksi worship for instance – were appropriated by brāhmaṇical religion from Jainism. Though there is debate among them regarding the validity of it. Another instance is the mythology around Rsabha, the first tīrthankara and similarities they find in the Śiva concept. Ṛṣabha also attained nirvana at Kailāśa mountain and the destruction of the three worlds in his case is interpreted as vanquishing kāma (desire), veguḷi (anger) and mayakkam (delusion). The arhat conquered these three inner traits to attain nirvāṇa. And according to the Jainas these three qualitative concepts were changed into violent concept of Śiva destroying the three worlds (tri-loka). Mayilai Sini Venkataswamy says Śivarātri is a concept borrowed from the Jainas. He writes, "Ādi bagavan̲, Ṛṣbha deva attained nirvāṇa on this day, i.e, māci māsam chaturdaśi tithi. (February). It is a common practice for Śaivas and Jainas to use the term 'śivagati' for demise / mokṣa. Terms such as śivapuri, śivagatināyakan̲ are found in Jaina textual tradition. The Kailāśa mountain is sacred to both Jainas and Śaivas. For Jainas it is Ādinātha's abode. Ādinātha is referred to in the Jaina tradition thus – "ālaneṭuniḻalamarntan̲ai kālam mūn̲r̲um kaṭantanai tāḻ śaḍai muṭiccenni kāturu ponniyir̲ kaṭavuḷ" (as one with locks – śaḍaya muḍi), conqueror of the three worlds, etc) In Pāṇḍyan times you have the image of Ādināth with locks."[243] He also points out that, "Triśaṣṭiśalākāpuruṣacaritam in its Ādīśvara Caritam refers to Ādinātha as one with locks." [244] And further, "Gōmukha yakṣan is considered Ādinātha's family

[243] Mayilaisini Venkataswamy, Saman̲amum Tamiḻum (Tamil), South India Saiva Siddhanta Publication, Tirunelveli, 1954; pp.81-82

[244] Ibid, p.84

deity. Nandi with a bull face as Śiva's mount was (later) incorporated into Śaivism. In Jainism, there is the Nandigaṇa. Ajjanandi, Pavanandi, Kaṇakanandi belong to this gaṇa."[245]

To draw this set of argument to a close (rather uneasily) one wishes to point out that 'incorporation' seems like a double-edged sword; it is not merely about incorporation of local cults by purāṇic religion (which helped brāhmiṇism) in Tamilnadu (or elsewhere) but should also be about establishing the superiority (or claims to superiority) of a certain system. But when it comes to other communities' response here, in the context of the Tamil Jainas (already losing hold over the region and the people from considerations of numbers and royal patronage) 'incorporation' of elaborate worship of yakṣis (not the tīrthaṅkaras as much) should be seen as an effort to 'retain' lost ground, as it were. The other rituals included were the kumbābhiśēkam of temples which the Jainas prefer to call Pañcakalyāṇa Pratiṣṭhā Mahotsavam; the pūṇūl (sacred thread) is worn on the same tithi as the brāhmiṇs do, on āvaṇi aviṭṭam (month of August-September, on avittam nakṣatra) represents wearing the three gems of Jaina faith, and so forth. Sandal paste on their foreheads, then, remains the only visible marker that distinguishes them (in a physical sense that is) from brāhmiṇs.

Bhakt, Ritualism in Jaina Religion

Jagdishchandra Jain says, "In the 10th century (AD) yakṣas and yakṣis came into prominence due to the bhakti cult of Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism in the south....Each tīrthaṅkara is said to be attended by a yakṣa and yakṣini...Padmāvati (yakṣi

[245] Ibid, pp.86-87

of Pārśvanātha) is popular in Karnataka...resides on a lokki tree and is also known as Lokkiyabbe, a tantric deity with occult powers...Ambicā is known as Kūṣmāṇḍi or Kūṣmāṇḍini (is) an obstacle remover....." [246]

"Akaḷañka, a celebrated 10th century logician, sums up the Jain search for a true god in his famous stotra to a Jina[247]. (Akaḷañkastotra)

"They call him Brahmā,
Yet his mind was filled
With passion for Ūrvaṣi the nymph.
Behold him move with a bowl for food,
And a gourd for water!
Himself a disciple,
What can he teach an ascetic like me?......

They call him Śiva and say
He has burnt to ashes the three worlds....
What is he to me?
Śañkara for me is the one
Who has extinguished all fear, lust, delusion, sorrow and anger,
The all-knower, the bringer of peace to all..." [248]

Jaini adds, "(The) legitimisation of yakṣa worship within the Jaina faith may have helped to prevent the influence of Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva bhakti movements on the Jaina laity. All doctrinal compromises have their price, and Jaina laypeople,

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[246] Jagdishchandra Jain, Studies in Early Jainism (selected research articles): "Jain Worship: a Critical view" (pp.172-180), Navrang, New Delhi, 1992.; p.175-6

[247] Padmanabh S. Jaini, Collected Papers on Jaina Studies, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 2000; "Jina Ṛṣabha as an Avatāra of Viṣṇu" (pp.325 – 349); p.344

[248] Ibid, p.345

who previously had only worshipped the Jinas, were increasingly attracted to the worldly benefits available from the yakṣas, while the mendicants busied themselves with the task of devising new rites, litanies, tantric practices to placate the yakṣas...." [249]

The pañcamantram; or pañcanamaskāra is recited by every Jaina. In today's time, every Jaina household has a cassette playing this every morning, and evening, after they light the lamps –

"Ôm namō arahantāṇam
ôm namô siddhāṇam
ôm namō āyiryāṇam
ōm namô uvajjhāyāṇam
ôm namō lôye savva sāhuṇam"

Navarātri – Women keep kolu in their homes – like their brāhmiṇical counterparts, dedicating each day of the nine days to a yakṣi. On the 10th day the Śrīpurāṇam is read out (like the pañcāṅkam – calendar is in non Jaina contexts - on Ugādi, which is when they celebrate the Tamil Jaina new year).

Śivarātri is celebrated as Jinaratri commemorating the first tīrthaṅkara Ādinātha's mokṣa. On this day, the temple at Tirunarungondai (Tirunaruṉkuṉṟam) is agog with activity as Tamil Jainas from across the state congregate for the 'narkāṭci'. This is a recent addition – not part of the Jaina textual tradition. One was told that this was mainly begun around 35 years ago to stem the rising influence of the Ayyappā cult among the Tamil Jaina laity. The method

[249] Ibid, p.275

followed is same as the vow taken to reach Sabarimala. That is, the laity takes the 40 day vow, similar to the one taken by Ayyappā devotees and reach Tirunarugondai at the end of the period. The major difference here is that women are very much part of the process. They can take shorter periods of vows (keeping in mind the menstrual cycle) instead of the 40 that men take. The deity at Tirunarungondai (Ādinātha) is hailed by local people as Appāṇḍai.

In months of March - April in Citamur the annual rathōtsavam is held for ten days. The mūlavar (deity of the inner sanctum of the Pārśvanātha temple) Pārśvanāthar's utsavar (procession deity) is taken on a tēr (chariot) each day a different mount – jñānavāhana, kudirai vāhana, devendra vāhana, sūrya vāhana, nāgavāhana, aṇṇa vāhana, pallaki, simha vāhana and so forth.

Ve.Vedachalam points out that "Bhakti (concept) both corresponded with and somewhat complemented yakṣi worship in Tamilnadu. But post 5th century AD Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava nāyaṉmārs and āḷvars through propaganda converted Jaina idols. While the former used Koṟṟavai, Mahiśāsuramardini, Kāḷi, Durgā, Saptamātrikas, the Jainas used their counterparts Ambicā, Padmāvati, Siddhhāyika, Cakrēśvari, Jvālāmālini, etc to propagate their faith. Cīvakacintāmaṇi also mentions the yakṣi as the benevolent goddess." [250] "Post 5th century AD the tīrthaṅkaras were flanked by yakṣis and yakṣa; after7th century AD yakṣis had separate identity and space, form and shrines for them. In Kuḷōttuṅga III period, (1204 AD) we have the Peramandur yakṣi temple in Tindivanam taluk. Similar ones came up in

[250] Ve.Vedachalam, Iyakki Vaḻipāḍu (Tamil), Agaram Printers (Sivagangai), Madurai, 1989, pp. 45-46. I thank amma for reading this text with me.

Ramanathapuram, Devakottai taluk, Sembattur in Pudukkottai district, Senganikuppam in South Arcot district, Chitral in Kanyakumari district."[251]

The yakṣis, according to Vedachalam, were initially "village goddesses (and folk deities) later incorporated by major religions as guardian deities or protection deities....in order to attract communities to their religion through their nature of worship. Lakṣmi's form and worship emanates from a former yakṣi worship (of the Mauryan period)."[252]

He points out that Pāvai (who is said to have shed tears whenever a government acted dishonestly or judges pronounced wrong judgments) worship is mentioned in Caṅkam literature. She was propitiated since ancient times. Her form was made out of earth, metal, gold of the kor̲a grass (akam 276) – either made as a toy or drawn on the kor̲a grass. In later times the festival dedicated to her was celebrated as pāvainōmbu, which changed to Tiruppāvai and Tirvembāvai. These later brāhmiṇical traditions had roots in these early forms of folk worship.[253]

Sangave refers to the sacred thread. "As a rule Jainas in south India wear a sacred thread.....In the south Arcot district in Tamilnadu though Jain girls never wear a sacred thread they are taught the thread wearing mantram amid all the ceremonies usual in the case of boys, when they are about eight years old....According to Pandit Nathuram Premi (a Jaiṇa scholar) this practice is not referred to at all in the old Jaina literature and is prescribed by later Jain works with a view to stem the tide of widespread persecution of

[251] Ibid, p.53
[252] Ibid, p.15
[253] Ibid, p.19-20

Jainas buy the Śaivas especially in Karnataka and southern India." [254]

Identity in Printing Texts

The printed editions of Tamil texts – ancient and otherwise – by Tamil Jainas in the modern period need to be seen in a critical context. So far as the Tamil Jainas are concerned, 'persecution' (in the nature of socio-political, cultural, bias and appropriation of Tamil) continued beyond the period of the 'bhakti' movement in the very idea of living within a larger brāhmiṇical system. Even within the context of scholarship on Tamil literature, perhaps they had to contend with debates on whether Iḷaṅko Aṭikaḷ (author of Cilappatikāram, brother of the Cēra king) was a Jaina; or was Tiruvaḷḷuvar a Jaina, and could Kuṟaḷ be called a Jaina work. It is also a time when Śaiva Siddhanta publications society brings out numerous editions of texts, of Tamil literature, including the verses of the Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava bards. Almost in every century of their existence in Tamilnadu, there seems to be at least one event that shows bias against the community in some form or the other, even if there is, simultaneously, support from various quarters. Marginalisation of a community and its traditions happened over a period, gradually, at subtle and obvious levels. The Tamil Jainas express strongly this sense of being marginalised. [255]

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[254] Vilas Adinath Sangave, Jaina Community: A Social Survey, Popular Prakashan, Mumbai, 1980 edition (first published in 1959); pp.251-252

[255] In this sense, it was difficult to look at 'ancient', 'medieval', 'modern' periods of history as neat compartments within which to reconstruct the Tamil Jaina community history. Nor was it easy to capture the question within a limited time-frame of 'early Tamiḻakam', though the title of the dissertation suggests it. What seemed larger crucial historical questions in terms of history of marginalising, itself, as a concept, refuse to be confined to one period and one time. Incidentally, one has consciously avoided recording here those sections within the Tevāram hymns that abuse the Jainas (Appar, Gñānasampantar's). It is a well recorded historical fact, and need not be reiterated. One accepts

The process of putting to print palm leaf manuscripts need to be looked into. Among the pioneers who devoted their time and energy to retrieving, compiling, editing manuscripts by the thousands, travelling to remote villages and meeting families, was the redoubtable 'Tamil savant', 'Tamil taatha' (as he is also variously referred to) U.Ve. Swaminatha Iyer (U.Ve.Ca). His was a 19th century liberal approach to documenting manuscripts for posterity. He collected manuscripts from almost every corner on almost every subject he could get hands on. He edited the Cīvakacintāmaṇi, Cilappatikāram, among other Tamil Jaina works that he collected. Sripal mentions an anecdote in connection with U.Ve.Ca and a Tamil Jaina manuscript. "U.Ve Swaminatha Iyer in his En Caritram (p.858) mentions Valayāpati. He saw a palm leaf manuscript of Valayāpati in the Tiruvaduturai maṭham. He had not thought of studying it then. But when he went back again to read it, he could not find that palm leaf manuscript in the same place." [256] Sripal says it could have been a deliberate act by the maṭha (non Jaina), that the manuscript could not be found again.

Apparently one Ramaswamy Mudaliyar of Salem [257] had first given a handwritten manuscript of Cīvakacintāmaṇi to U.Ve.Ca when the latter joined the Government College at Kumbakonam as head of the Tamil department. "Mudaliyar was responsible for persuading Iyer to edit and publish the ancient Tamil classics. Iyer had till then confined his enjoyment of Tamil literature to medieval works. Mudaliar also gave a handwritten copy of Jeevaka Chintamani for

those as pre-given and on which much historical writing has occurred. Moreover, it was more important to focus was on the Jaina response to all these instances, and to give them the active agency as historical actors.

[256] Jeevabandhu T. S. Sripal, Tamiḻakattil Jainam (Tamil), Svasti Sri Lakshmi Sena Pattaraka Pattacaryavarya Jaina Matham, Kollapur, Chennai, 1975; p.45-6

[257] A Tamil Jaina, as the Jainas aver. Incidentally, A. Chakravarti too, worked (later) at the Government College, Kumbakonam. Kumbakonam, incidentally, still has a few Tamil Jaina families who have resided there for generations.

publication. As Chintamani was a Jain classic, Iyer went to the homes of Jains in Kumbakonam to get some doubts cleared. He also read the Jain epics and collated several manuscript versions and arrived at a correct conclusion. It was due to his efforts that the Jeevaka Chintamani was published in 1887."[258]

Memories, Metaphors and Motifs of Persecution

The names that figure most in people's memories of the victimisation and persecution of Jainas in Tamilnadu are those of Appar and Gñānasampantar, the two Śaivite bards of the bhakti revivalism. Also figuring in this connection is the name of a certain 'cakkiḷi raja' who was responsible for beheading of the Jainas. In writings of people such as Sripal, Chakravarti, Mayilai Sini and others, the Śaiva-Jaina conflict is addressed more in terms of its immediate association with the Jaina community identity rather than in a larger political, social context of Tamiḻakam.

Cakkiḷi Rājā Story

The first time I heard the 'cakkiḷi rājā' story was at Vilukkam, at a Tamil Jaina settlement. In fact in this place this was the first story that was narrated to me the moment one asked them if they remembered any account of being persecuted. It was not the Appar or Gñānasampantar account that they came up with immediately. As one had expected. The story goes like this – a certain rājā of Cеñji [259] desired

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[258] S. Thangavelu, "U.V.Swaminatha Iyer (1855 – 1942)" (originally published in The Hindu, February 26th, 1996; sourced from Tamilnation.org)

[259] At Vilukkam the people simply said, 'oṟu Ceñji rājā'; whereas in other villages, it was 'cakkiḷi rājā'. In some cases it was 'cakkiḷi rājā poṉ keṭa katai' (the story of the cakkiḷi rājā asking for a girl, in marriage).Some places they would not be sure – 'was it Desingu raja?' they would wonder. However, Desingu Raja was by far remembered fondly. And at some places they told me his wife was a Jaina –

to marry a woman from a higher caste that his. He asked the brāhmiṇs for a bride from their community. They refused, but cleverly said to him, the Jainas (samaṇar) are a caste higher than the brāhmiṇs. If the Jainas agree, they will readily give a woman from their community to the king in marriage. The king duly approached the Jainas. Horrified at the prospect, the Jainas asked him to reach their village on a said date for the marriage. The king arrived, only to see at the marriage space, a female dog tied to the post. The Jainas had tied the dog, and all of them vacated their village. They left a note around its collar that said if he could straighten that dog's tail they would give him a daughter from their community in marriage. In some versions they say it was black dog tied to the post, with a note that if that black dog could be made a white one, the Jainas would give their girl to the king in marriage. The enraged ruler ordered beheading of Jainas, whosoever should be seen in the streets. This continued, and many Jainas were killed, until one day the king, who had been married in due course, became father to a son. In that moment of joy, he ordered to stop the killings.

The 'sumaṉtān talai pattu' story

Closely linked to the above story is this one. The king did not stop at ordering beheading of the Jainas. He commanded that the person who beheads ten Jainas should carry the head of every tenth Jaina killed. That is how the term 'sumaṉtān (carried) talai (head) pattu (ten) came about. Another version of this term goes like this – "They beheaded one, and placed ten heads over one, and thus went on killing

something I have not been able to confirm. The story, however, was common in all the Tamil Jaina villages in terms of the sequencing, motifs. I narrate the common story told several times by the Tamil Jainas mostly of Cenji and surrounding villages.

Jainas. This is referred to as sumaṉtān talaipattu (carried ten heads)."[260]

To save their lives while these ruthless killings were going on, many Jainas in fear smeared sacred ash on their foreheads and threw away their sacred threads. These are the *nīr-pūci nayiṉārs* (the Śaiva veḷḷāḷars) – they became Śaivas – and they reside in the places which were previously Jaina settlements, and some of them stay close to the Jaina settlements too. They eat before dark, they are vegetarian till date and many of them visit our Jaina shrines as well.

Thurston notes, "In 1478 AD, the ruler of Gingee was one Venkatampittar, Venkatapati (local oral tradition gives his name as Dupala Kistnappa Nayak) who belonged to the comparatively low caste of the Kavarais. He asked the local brahmans (for a girl from their caste to marry, they directed him to the Jainas; they called him to a particular spot; left a dog tied to a post at the marriage place...) Furious...he issued orders to behead all Jains...."[261] "Meanwhile, another Jain of the Gingee country, Gangayya Udaiyar of Taiyanur, had fled to the protection of the zamindar of Udaiyarpalayam in Trichinopoly, who befriended him and gave him some land...(he fetched back Virasenacarya, made tour of Gingee...got some people to return to their faith). These people had mostly become Saivites, taken off their sacred threads and put holy ash on their foreheads, and the name Nirpuci Vellalas....is still retained. The descendants of Gangayya Udaiyar still live in Tayanur, and in memory of the services of their ancestors to the Jain cause, they are given the 1st betel and leaf on festive occasions, and have a

[260] Mallinatha Sastry, Tamilnadu kā Jain Itihās (Hindi), Kundakunda Bharati, Delhi, 1995; p.46

[261] E.Thurston, Castes and Tribes of South India, Vol. II, Government Press, Madras, 1909; p. 429

leading voice in the election of the high priest at Sittamur in the Tindivanam taluk. This high priest, who is called Mahadhipati, is elected by representatives from the chief Jain villages. These are, in Tindivanam taluk, Sittamur itself, Viranamur, Vilukkam, Peramandur, Alagramam and the Velur and Tayanur already mentioned."[262]

The above story is also recorded in the Mackenzie manuscripts (D 3796, Vol I, Madras, 1837) [263]

"Many Jainas, who were used to wearing sacred threads, threw them for fear of being killed. Many became Saivas, wearing ash on the forehead and these are referred to as nir puci nayinar (the Jainas who wore sacred ash). At the same time, Virasenacarya who was sitting in meditation at Vellore was forcibly taken to the king. Te king set him free as he was happy at the birth of a male child just then.Virsenacarya left for Sravanabelgola. Around this time a person named Gangeya Udaiyar at Tayanur, near Cenji, went to Udaiyarpalayam raja for protection and the king gave him land. After the prescution and killing, Gangeya Udaiyar fetched Virasenacarya from Sravanabelgola and reconverted those who had changed their faiths, back to Jainism.With yajnopavitam (punul) and ratnatrayam. He could not reconvert all the people who had become Saivas. Till date the Udaiyar clan has special place in hearts of Jainas of Tamilnadu. In weddings and so on they are given the mutal mariyatai. Some converted to Saivas others became Muslims. Around Kerala some Muslims named Jaina Allauddin or

[262] Ibid, p. 430

[263] Section 2: "Account of the Raja of Gingee who persecuted the Jainas". Available at the Government Oriental Manuscripts Library, Chennai. I thank the staff and Dr. Sundara Pandian, for allowing me access to this collection.

Nainar Mohammad. These were Jains at one point. Masjids in Tamilnadu are still called pallivasal."[264]

"Around 500 years ago – in 1478 – Cenji (ruler Venkatapathy Naicker, also called Tumal Krishnappa Naikan – a Telugu ruler) wanted to marry a woman from each high caste. He called the brāhmiṇs (they did not want to marry into a lower caste); they directed him to the Jainas as the latter were of a higher caste, and if they agreed to give their daughter the brāhmiṇs would agree too. The ruler did so. Jainas together decided to call ruler to a place on the said occasion. He came there, only to find a dog tied up there. They migrated. The ruler ordered killing of Jainas "Sumaṉtāntalaipattu" – the Jainas of Cenji killed. Term used for this incident. Many ran away and some put sacred ash and converted to Śaiva faith – nīr pūci nayiṉār (these are the Śaiva veḷḷāḷar). In this time Vīrasenācārya in Vellore was taken to the king. Gāṅgeya Uḍaiyār of Uḍaiyārpālayam, who had been to Śravaṇabeḷgoḷa, came along with Vīrasenācārya to Cenji; initiated the converted Jainas back to their faith (from Śaivism to Jainism), giving them sacred thread. Gāṅgeya Uḍaiyār's descendants are still in Tāyaṉūr. They are given the mutal mariyātai till date during weddings in Cenji in honour of Gāṅgeya Uḍaiyār's contribution to saving the Jaina faith."[265]

The Manjaputhur chettiar and Jaina Connection (linking the cakkiḷi rājā story) –

[264] Mallinatha Sastry, op.cit, pp46-47. But the term palli, started by the Jainas for educating, perhaps became a common generic term used of any place of congregation to learn something, and one may take this explanation with some trepidation.

[265] Mayilaisini Venkataswamy, Samaṇamum Tamiḻum (Tamil), South India Saiva Siddhanta Publication, Tirunelveli, 1954; p73

In the course of his campaigns Sripal recounts an interesting incident. At Madurai, Ramanathapuram, Paramakudi and Ilayamkuti resides this community of Manjaputhur chetti. They are small merchants / pawn brokers....This community has their family deity at Tiruppuvanam near Manamadurai, called Gorakkanāthar. They visit this place and offer sacrifice of goats (not less than 8 each time). When Sripal learnt of this practice he went to that place. There he saw a statue of Mahāvīra at the temple entrance, and seemed to be in worship. He was struck and asked an old man there about it. The old man (from that community) referred to the deity as Ammaṇasvāmi, their original family deity – kuladevatai. He narrated the story of their clan and their organs. Their ancestors 'came form South Arcot, Manjakuppam (near Cuddalore). A king asked for the hand of a girl from their community in marriage. They were not interested. At the clan leader's house, they tied a dog to a post and left a note for the ruler on a palm leaf and left that village that very night. And settled near Madurai. Sripal was struck at the similarity with a story in the Jaina tradition. [266]

Thurston also mentions this account in his Castes and Tribes of South India (vol 2) Sripal thought perhaps these chettis were Jainas at one point of time now converted. He succeeded in convincing them against animal sacrifice, invoking their Jaina past.[267]

Mayilaisini Venkataswamy also refers to this community "In Ramanthapuram is a sect called the Manjaputhur Chettiar. They are Śaivas. Inside the Iḷakāyañkudi Śiva temple they propitiate Ammaṇa Svāmi (a Jaina image, 'amaṇam' –

[266] Ka. Ci Tanakkoti Mohan Sundiran, Jeevabanhdu T. S. Sripal Avarkaḷin Vāḻkaiyum Tōṇḍum, Vardhamana Patippakam, Chennai, 1959, p.103
[267] Ibid, p.104

'nude'), which is their kuladaivam. Śaiva chettiārs were Jainas in the Pandyan times..."[268]

One will revert to the 'mutal mariyatai' motif in due course. But here one may mention that Vilukkam, Peramandur, Tayanur, each seem to have the concept of 'mutal mariyātai' (the honour of the first betel on important occasions). While Thurston's and other versions have mentioned Gangeya Udaiyar and Tayanur getting the 'mutal mariyātai' in Cenji on weddings and so on, people of Vilukkam have their own story about helping re-establish the Jaina families and the matham at Cittamur (in the course of the same story) and hence the mutal mariyātai and milk from their village going 'first' for any of the auspicious occasions, the ter, for instance. This may be seen as seeking sanction as the village that helped the Tamil Jaina faith to survive in the face of the persecution and through this seeking a niche in the popular Tamil Jaina history. Which is a significant point in construction of the Tamil Jaina identity.

About these episodes in Tamil history Sripal says, "Impalement, exodus of Jainas, killing, land grabbing from Jainas are episodes that reflect a 'veṟi' (mania) not conflict. This resulted in Jainas being marginalised and many converted to Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava religions."[269]

A word or two about this Nayaka king mentioned in the story. "Gingee found its most vigorous ruler in the person of Tubakḳi (Duppala) Krishnappa Nayakar (Tuppaki Kirusnappa in Mackenzie manuscript)...Tubakki (1509-21) ruled over a

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[268] Mayilai Sini Venkataswamy, Samaṇamum Tamiḻum (Tamil), South India Saiva Siddhanta Publication, Tirunelveli, 1954; p.76

[269] Jeevabandhu T. S. Sripal, Tamiḻakattil Jainam (Tamil), 1975; p.50

realm that extended from the town of Nellore in the north to the Coleroon river in the south."[270]

Further, "The stories of Tubakki Krishnappa recall his reign as a sort of Nayak golden age; a period of peace and ordered harmony under the most celebrated of the Vijayanagar emperors, Krishnadevaraya, a time when the three southern Nayaks of Gingee, Thanjavur, and Madurai are supposed to have accepted the imperial definition of their domains and harboured no thoughts of independence or rebellion."[271]

There have been no studies one has come across on this story that the Jainas relate of the Nayaka (why they call him 'cakkiḷi' [272] rājā is also curious – perhaps it signifies a generic name for a lower caste). One would allude to studies on Cenji and also on the other famous ruler, one that even the Jainas admired, Desingu Rājā. If only to make a point as to where are the Jainas and this story in all these studies, though they also use the Mackenzie Manuscripts as one of their sources, besides others. If this story is so strongly remembered regarding their community, did it historically take place? Apart from mentioning it as a story the Mackenzie manuscripts do not say much else. Even at eth metaphorical level, it is intriguing that this story does not have any mention in the works on Jainism in Tamilnadu, even as a 'wandering tale' that the Jainas remember, recount (and in that sense, re-live). One is trying to locate the story within the question of the Tamil Jaina identity under threat, and their perception of the other community closest to them in attitudes and perceptions on certain everyday habits, the 'nīr-pūci' Śaiva veḷḷāḷars. Or perhaps this story has more to

[270] Alf Hiltebeitel, The Cult of Draupadi: Mythologies: from Gingee to Kurukshetra, (Vol 1) Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1991, p.19. Hiltebetitel does not qualify "vigorous" however.
[271] Ibid, p.99. Emphasis, wherever, mine.
[272] Cakkiḷi is a term used for leather workers, cobblers in Tamil.

it than the persecution of Jainas? In that sense it needs to be located within the Nāyaka rule and changes in that period.

Karashima[273], for instance, mentions that "Conditions in the fifteenth century proved to be no less harsh and exploitative (the other being AD 1250 to 1400 which 'brought considerable hardship to people'[274]), as is evidenced by the heavy burden of taxes imposed on the people by the invading warriors and the arbitrariness of their taxation system. We have plenty of inscriptions which record the 'running away' of cultivators and artisans during this period.....There was yet another factor, more important and basic to the society, which imposed additional burdens on the population during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. We allude here to the class struggle which assumed a new dimension in the thirteenth century. More specifically, during their period the confrontation was between two agrarian classes, landholders, on the one hand, and tenants or landless cultivators, on the other. The prevalence of landlord villages became conspicuous after AD 1250 and created new relations among the classes within the agrarian order. The poorer peasants, along with artisans and merchants, suffered under the oppression of the well-to-do peasants who became landlords. This confrontation was made even more acute by the extortionate demands of the Vijayanagar invaders during the fifteenth century. This is well attested to by the open revolt of the Vaḷañgai / Iḍañgai people against the landlords (kaṇiyāḷar) and the Vijayanagar officers (irājagarattār) during the first half of the fifteenth century in the region South Arcot, Tiruchirapalli and Thanjavur districts. It seems however that the growth of the nāyakas in the latter half of

[273] Noboru Karashima, A Concordance of Nāyakas: The Vijayanagar Inscriptions in South India, OUP, Delhi, 2002
[274] Ibid, p.31

the fifteenth century had a stabilising effect on the society, as we shall see later... [275]

'Running away', meanwhile, is something even the Tamil Jainas refer to in their 'cakkiḷi rājā' (Krishnappa Nāyaka) story; that many had to flee to other villages in that time. If seen in the context that Karashima mentions, perhaps the 'running away' is due to economic and political reasons, being perceived by the Tamil Jainas as running away from persecution as well, which is their most instant response and reaction to hardships faced at a community level – having a real history behind the whole understanding? So they see everything through a mirror of being victimised, persecuted? Or, it may also be seen as something that these political, economic conditions added to the social attitude towards to the Jainas by the nāyaka ruler who was closer to the (vīra) Śaiva tradition. There have been times in history where economic, political excesses do combine with social prejudices and bias against a section, caste, community too. The conflict within the agrarian order is also an economic context one wishes to place the Tamil Jain agriculturists in. Surely it is not merely in terms of the Jaina religion that the Tamil Jainas related to the broader society. There are economic and other considerations like for any other community. One's contention is that it is these aspects that are missing from Jaina studies – not to see them contesting for economic, political, other benefits.

Persecution must be seen as a phenomenon layered against all these (non-religious / extra religious, if one may put it that way) levels of dissatisfaction, discontent as a community towards the larger, more overwhelming view of

[275] Ibid, pp.32-33. All of these had Tamil Jaina agrarian settlements incidentally, most concentrated in South Arcot, and to a medium extent in Thanjavur. Emphasis, wherever, mine.

the state, society which is hardly 'Jaina' in any sense of the term. While the Buddhists chose the better conditions prevalent in Sri Lanka (where they moved to, escaping from the bhakti persecution), but not without compromising on some of their original doctrine – as one notes in the chapter Nīlakeci, talking of the cult of Pattini as one example of Buddhist – popular interface, learning to live with these contradictions, negotiating their status in the Sri Lankan society.

The Jainas remained in Tamilnadu. And continue till date to affirm their identity as an independent community. This also shows in their own perspectives on persecution – failing to place it within socio-economic changes that swept the state in these periods whenever they were attacked as a social group. Referring back to Karashima's above mentioned study, most Nāyaka inscriptions he mentions record donations to non Jaina temples, in areas where substantial Jaina settlements existed (and many exist till date). For instance – Arni, Polur, Cheyyar, Cenji, Kunrattur, Villupuram. Many of these records show concessions, grants of land to brahmin. [276] Interestingly one of the inscriptions (SII XXII, 127, AD 1532) at Jambai, Tirukkoilur taluk records exemption of taxes for the devadana of the Jambai temple. Jambai (South Arcot), incidentally has a few Tamil Jaina families still settled there today. And was known to be a Jaina settlement since the early centuries AD. There is a Tamil Brāhmi inscription dated to 1st century AD on a rock inside a cavern of the Atiyamāṉ dynasty of the Koṅgu country, who caused to be made this abode to a Jaina ascetic.[277] Perhaps a fresh wave of sanction to brāhmiṇism, and temples happened in the period of the Nāyakas. Karashima does not make mention of

[276] Ibid, pp.36-44

[277] A. Ekambaranathan, C. K. Sivaprakasam, Jaina Inscriptions in Tamilnadu (a Topographical List), Research Foundation for Jainology, Chennai, 1987; No. 431, p.360.

the Jaina associations in these places. There is just one more point to be made here before moving into the motifs of the cakkili raja story. That Cenji region and South Arcot seem to have numerous stories – there is the Muttāl Rāvuttan story, the Desingu rājā story, Draupadi stories, and our own cakkiḷi rājā story, and yes, of course, the Nīli stories that one addresses in another chapter. Cenji – south Arcot seems to abound in story telling traditions. Some of these are kingly tales while others tales of a person, or a cult figure. But all these stories have their own perspective on the region. Each of these stories is seemingly disparate; but perhaps there is need to look at the links. Those relying purely on inscriptional evidence, fail to take note of these sources while reconstructing the history of the region. But there are also those that take the stories to their most magnificent conclusions, to give a conclusive picture of one aspect of the region. There seems no 'middle path' as yet, for those engaging with these sources. Or, a path that blends the two traditions of historiography (in terms of identifying sources to write a history, many histories). There may yet be a way to look at the blurring of lines between these two traditions of historiography. Wherein 'so called 'hard' evidence takes from so -called 'loose / soft evidence'. In case of South Arcot alone, or the Tamil Jaina community, a region rooted in its stories, even a comparative analysis of the stories may lead to new information on the region that may be missed if inscriptional records are taken at their face value, as the 'truth' merely because they are committed to writing, as it were.

In terms of looking at economic and other factors symbolising marginalisation of the community, it may help to mention a few stories that Mayilai Sini Venkataswamy refers to. "A story in the Periyapurāṇam (Cēkkiḻār's) talks

about Tiruvoṭṭiyūr. A Śaiva planted a male toddy tree. Few Jainas questioned him if these male trees could transform into female trees; they questioned Gñānasambandar, who sang a patikam and before dawn the trees transformed into female trees. The Jainas fled that village. The Tiruvoṭṭiyūr Śiva temple has frescoes showing impalement of Jainas (as in Madurai)" [278] Again, Tiruvārūr Tirukkoḷam is a tank feeding 18 acres The Periyapurāṇam mentions that the Taṇḍiaṭikaḷ (Śaiva) tank was a small one surrounded by Jaina land and paḷḷis on 4 banks. The Śaivas wanted to make it bigger by removing the Jaina settlements. Jainas protested. Cēkkiḻār mentions that Śiva appeared in the dream of the king to command destruction of the Jaina settlements at this place."[279]

These stories reflect efforts at land appropriation and seeking control over the sources of cultivation – in the last case the tank which was the central point of these settlements. Extensive tank based agriculture; attributing divinity (through use of Purāṇic mythology) to tanks was in profusion in this period of conflict – which was not merely 'religious' in nature. There were underlying economic considerations. Incidentally, among the Tamil Jaina villages one visited the number of temples with koḷams and agrahārams kind of cluster settlement are rare and very few; this kind of evolution of clusters around temple, irrigated land and tank networks were limited to and revolved around the temple bhakti worship.

There are just a few more stories that one needs to bring to note here, to highlight the point that though these are stories

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[278] Mayilaisini Venkataswamy, Samaṇamum Tamiḻum (Tamil), South India Saiva Siddhanta Publication, Tirunelveli, 1954,pp.68-69
[279] Ibid, p.70

(not unbiased, and certainly myths perpetrated to state a point) that these stories were very much prevalent for later scholars and historians to record, shows that there was a general atmosphere of the Jaina persecution which the community itself internalised and that reflects in all its responses towards constructing its own identity.

Thurston records two stories regarding the Śaiva – Jaina conflict. "...The Madura District Gazetteer mentions taking from the Madura Sthalapurana about the origins of Anaimalai – The Jains of Conjeevaram tried to convert the Saivite people of Madurai to the Jain faith. Finding the task difficult, they had recourse of magic. They dug a great pit10 miles long, performed a sacrifice thereon, and thus causes a huge elephant to rise from it. This beast they sent against Madura. It advanced towards the town, shaking the whole earth at every step, with the Jains marching close behind it. The Pandya king invoked the aid of Siva and the god arose and slew the elephant with his arrow at the spot where it now lies petrified....In connection with the long barren rock near Madura called Nagamalai – Local legends declare...it is the remains of a huge a serpent, brought into existence by the magic arts of the Jains which was only prevented by the grace of Siva from devouring the fervently Saivite city it so nearly approaches."[280]

"For the following account thereof, I am indebted to Mr. K.V. Subramani Aiyar. Sri Gnana Sambandar Svami who was an incarnation of Subramanya, the son of Siva...was sent into the world by Siva to put down the growing prevalence of the Jain heresy, and to re-establish the Saivite faith in Southern India...At the time a certain Kun Pandya

[280] E. Thurston, Castes and Tribes of South India, Vol. II, Government Press, Madras, 1909, p.434

(hunchback) Pandyan was ruling the Madura country, where as elsewhere Jainism had asserted its influence...The Queen and the prime minister were Saivite, invited Gnana Sambandar (to extirpate the Jains). He came with thousands of followers and took abode in a mutt on the north side of Vaigai river...Jain priests, 8000 in number, found this out....set fire to his residence. But disciples extinguished the flames...Sambandar made flames take the form of a virulent fever to affect one side of the King's body, which he cured...The king became beautiful and was called Sundarapandya thenceforth....Books of Saivites travailed upstream and Jains' books perished; (Post these trials, etc) many converted to Saivites. The number (of those who converted) was so great that the available supply of sacred ashes was exhausted. (Those who could not be converted) were impaled on stakes resembling sula or trident....The events (are)..gone through at 5 of the 12 annual festivals at Madura temple. On these occasions an image representing a Jain impaled on a stake is carried in procession."[281]

On "Textures of Time"[282], Constructing Cenji: Problematising the Cakkiḷi rājā Story

[281] Ibid, pp 435- 438; emphasis (and in parenthesis, mine); note that his 'source for the story' is a brahmin.

[282] After the title of Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman, Sanjay Subramaniam, Textures of Time: Writing History in South India (1600 – 1800), Permanent Black, Delhi, 2001. It must be mentioned here that on listening to the Tamil Jaina story of the 'cakkiḷi rājā' and 'oṟu Cenji rājā' one searched a lot for 'corroborating' ('historical')records. Besides the Mackenzie manuscripts and Thurston mentioning this (apart from, of course, scholars such as Mayilai Sini Venkataswamy and Sripal referring to it) there was nothing else to be found. In any of the 'histories' of Cenji and South Arcot. About this episode which, even in its violent metaphor of beheading, seems significant. But then, why should the British records (with these two above mentioned too, taking it from the stories of those that narrated these accounts to them, which only says this account was importantly in the memories of the Jainas since long, which then makes it significant again) be seen as 'historical' when compared to the oral account of the Jainas in each village referring one to the story? While one was already more than half way through 'making sense' of this tale, one discovered Textures of Time. But as one had expected, one did not, again, find the mention of the Jaina rendering of the 'Cakkiḷi rājā' story in this text. Hence, the 'missing Tamil Jainas'.

One would like to begin with a quotation the above mentioned book, which helps state one's case about the missing Jainas very succinctly. This is a translation of the story in the Prabhāvaka-carita of Prabhācandra, "which tells of conflict between Brāhmiṇ intellectuals and the great 12th century Jaina teacher Hemacandra at the court of the King Kumārapāla. [283] 'Once, during the rainy season Hemacandra gave an exposition about the life of Lord Nemi, in the course of which he told how the Pāṇḍava brothers of the Mahābhārata had renounced the world and become Jaina monks. The local Brāhmiṇs...protested: the Mahābhārata says that the Pāṇḍavas went wandering into the Himālayas at the end of their lives, devoted to Lord Śiva. The king called upon to arbitrate in the matter summoned Hemacandra, and asked (if what he said of the Pāṇḍavas was true, to which Hemacandra replied) - This has been said by our ancient ācāryas...and it is... true their sojourn in the Himālayas is described in the Mahābhārata. But we do not know whether those Pāṇḍavas ...described in our scriptures are the same as those ...in the work...of sage Vyāsa... (Hemacandra, it is quoted here, then told the king of an account in the Mahābhārata wherein Vyāsa wrote an episode of Bhīṣma who told his attendants that his body should be cremated at the place where none was cremated before. When they went to do so after his death, the attendants heard a divine voice that said) – 'A hundred Bhīṣmas have been cremated here, and three hundred Pāṇḍavas....as for Karṇas their number is beyond counting'. Having quoted this...Hemacandra said, hearing this, in our minds we believe that among the hundreds of Pāṇḍavas mentioned here, it is possible that some may have been Jainas..." [284] This story is quoted by the

[283] Ibid, p15
[284] Ibid, pp.15-16

authors in the context of (questioning) "singularity of a reported story". [285]

The three authors take up for analysis the story of the young Desingu (Jai Singh) Rājā, a Rajput ruler of Cenji who, refusing to submit to the demands of the Arcot Nawab, died fighting in a battle, and his young newly married queen committed sati in his pyre. They read the Telugu and Tamil versions of the story, and make it out to be a great tragedy, filled with brāhmiṇical metaphors. Thus, in the Tamil anonymous version, "...The battle was as fierce as when Bhīma fought his foes in the Mahābhārata, or as Rāma's fight with Rāvaṇa; the nawab's troops turned and ran, claiming to be Brāhmiṇs with sacred threads or foreigners (para-desi) who should not be killed....All of this happened...on and immediately after the autumn Mahānavami festival..." [286] In the Telugu version it begins with Indira asking Nārada if anything new is happening on the earth and Nārada narrates the story." [287] The authors note the additions to the story – in the Tamil version, his going to the temple of lord Ranganātha who turns away his head from him (an ominous sign). [288]

While one will not go into the detailed reading of the Desingu story itself offered by the authors, it is important to make a few points that connect one to one's own 'Cenji story' – of the 'cakkiḷi rājā' and 'sumaṉtāṉ talai pattu' metaphor. The metaphors used in explaining, decoding the texture of the story of Raja Jai Singh (Desingu rājā) come from an overwhelming purāṇic and Śaivite tradition. Which is understandable to a point, considering the fact that the

[285] Ibid, p.15
[286] Ibid, pp.156-157
[287] Ibid, p.158
[288] Ibid, p.168

versions follow from these paradigms. Then they move on to the 'Teyvīka-rājan̲' (god-king) katai (story) based on the talapurāṇam of Tirukkōvalūr (site of a Śiva temple) whose antecedents are traced to the Śaivite family of gods. Again, it is a story of a local hero with divine (Purāṇic) antecedents, including the Tamil (now universalised) Murukan̲. And in essence it is a brāhmiṇical tale. The authors link this story of the Teyvīka rājan̲ to Desingu rājā in an almost linear movement through historical-cultural time. Which they any case do state - "There is, of course, internal movement from Teyvīka Rājan̲ to Desingu Rājā – historical movement, that subsumes the switch in genres (from sthalapurāṇa to epic) and that also confronts a new temporality, even linear, and neutral. In Arcot we can trace the intersection of this new mode – let us call it 'clock-time' ...- with the self contained and self-perpetuating sequence of the autarchic hero entering into contest....There is a sense in which history, seen as a system, consists precisely in the unexpected juxtaposition and interweaving of such innately disparate temporal and causal modes...One striking aspect of the texts (they use) is the eerie synchronicity of their surviving social and ethical words, differently integrated in each case into a wider cultural sphere...."[289]

Where would the Jaina story figure in this account? Where, for instance, would a tradition of the 'suman̲tān talai pattu' (for a different period of Cenji, although) figure in these linear synchronicities, bereft as it is, of all the metaphors and hyperboles available to the talapurāṇam and other brāhmiṇical story-forms of the medieval period; and basically far removed from the Purāṇic-Tamil interface?

[289] Ibid, pp.181-182

Sadly, again, it remains a linear continuity of Cañkam - Murukan̲ – Śaiva (brāhminical) metaphors.[290]. Desingu Raja is generally seen as a good king. But in another sense Textures...seems to reflect as to which narrative, which 'texture' of the narrative, dominates in story telling tradition...It is that of Murukan̲-Śiva-Teyvīka Rājan̲ continuity. To assume this understanding for the Arcot region as a whole without question – is the problem.

In the introduction to the Senji part of the book (Textures...) one notices a certain exoticising (though poetic) of South Arcot as a region and as a cultural zone. Senji, thus, is "one of the most melodramatic of all South Indian landscapes – a huge stony mountain rising out of the paddy fields and continuous with a neighbouring range of boulder-strewn hills and ridges. It is a site meant for a heroic stand....Arcot has its own social, political, and institutional integrity, that gives birth to a certain cultural perspective..." [291] In the entire reading and partial representation of the history of the region, there is no mention to the Jaina tradition which has been prominent in Cenji (and South Arcot in general). Not far from the fortress mentioned, incidentally, is the rock face with 24 tirthankaras carved on it, at a place called Tirunātharkun̲r̲u, which, according to the local Tamil Jainas, was a place of pilgrimage even for the rulers of Cenji, including, of course Desingu Rājā, most prominently. Whether this is mentioned by the Jainas to gain sanction form association with the good king of Cenji, can be a valid question.

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[290] Desingu Rājā's wife, in the account of some Tamil Jainas, was a Jaina. Though this one is not corroborated by evidence. But closest to the fact may be that she may have propitiated at various sacred centres, the Jaina temples and the rock at Tirunātharkun̲r̲u near Cenji for, being one of them.
[291] Ibid, p.141

Cenji- 'Cenji was part of Toṇḍaimaṇṭalam in Pallava times; and part of Jayaṅkoṇḍachōḻamaṇḍalam – Rājendravalanāḍu (1044 AD) and Uttamavalanāḍu (1114 AD), Siṅgapura division. In inscriptional records from 870 AD onwards it is mentioned as part of Siṅgapura nadu. Cenji was known in various times as Simhapuram (Pallava), Siṅgapuram (Choḻa) and Siṅgavaram (Vijayanagara). Jainism was widespread in Cenji more than two thousand years ago, through the times of the Pallava, Chōḻa, Pāṇḍya, Sambuvarāya, Vijayanagar, and Nāyaka rulers.'[292]

"Gingee (Chenji, formerly called Nasratgodda by the Musalmans), 16 miles south west of Tindivanam, population 524....The citadel on the north is called Kistnagiri, that on the south Chandrayan Drug (durg), and that on the west the highest and most inaccessible of the three is named Rajagiri or 'king of hills'. There is also a smaller and less important fortified hill, Chakkili Durg to the south of the last." [293] Chakkiḷi interestingly is the prefix to the king referred to in the Jaina stories. Probably it refers to this fortified hill, and the king that ruled from there; or who represented the administration at Cenji. Yet, there is the low-caste association to the king. Even if 'cakkiḷi' may not have meant the 'cobbler' caste in these stories.

Motifs in The Cakkiḷi rājā story - There is, for one, the lower caste angle [294] to the 'cakkili raja', which may explain the nature of response to his proposal seeking a marriage alliance – tying a dog to a post and leaving a note on its

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[292] Krishnamurthy, Cenjip Pakutiyil Camaṇam (Tamil), Sekar Patippakam, 1994; pp. 23 -25. I thank Mr. Jinadas (Tindivanam – of Perumpukai) for lending me a copy of this book; a comprehensive account of Jainism in this region; also looks at the community settled today.

[293] Gazette of South Arcot, 1906; p.347

[294] Thurston refers to Kistnappa Nāyaka belonging to one "kavarai" caste (Thurston, cf.cit, p.429); Winslow's Tamil Eglish dictionary calls Kavarai a lower caste.

collar – and also explains the nature of punishments he is said to have meted on the community (beheading the Jainas). But there may be other angles to the story. Thurston records Venkatapati Nayaka (alias Kistnappa Nayaka)'s time to be 1478. "By late 14th century, northern Tamilnadu was organised into five or six provinces called rājya or ucāvaḍi...; this administrative system...was highly exploitative and colluded with local military leaders (nāyaka) and landlords (kaṇiyāḷar) in extorting as much revenue as possible..." [295] And in 1429, a "revolt of cultivators and artisans" [296] also seems to have taken place. In this context, "the nāyaka chiefs surfaced as agents of Vijayanagara in the restoration of peace and used their local leverage to consolidate positions of authority as nāyakaṭṭanam in the Kannada and Tamil regions and as nāyaṉkāram in Telugu speaking regions." [297] One has already referred to the 'running away' of peasants and artisans that Karashima mentions. Is it possible to conjecture then? That these nayakas (and their chiefs) could have colluded with certain castes and in this exercise? In which case, the Tamil Jainas (agriculturists) fled and their land was usurped by brahmins and Śaiva veḷḷāḷars – the latter being in a larger majority today in the areas Karashima mentions. Are the Manjaputhu Chettiars among those that fled in this time and which is why they narrate the same story of their origin and they worship a deity that resembles a tīrthaṅkara? In some places in Tamilnadu, any case, the Jainas do have the caste suffix of Cheṭṭi. Something serious had to have happened which gave rise to this story - a story that is part of the collective memory of the Tamil Jainas of the South Arcot region.

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[295] Kenneth Hall, ed, Structure and Society in Early South India: Essays in Honour of Noboru Karashima, OUP, New Delhi, 2001; pp. 4-5

[296] Ibid, pp.4-5

[297] Ibid, pp.4-5

Coming to the 'perpetrator' of this violence, Venkatapathy Nāyakan̲, why did he desire to marry a woman from a 'higher' caste? Why did the brahmins direct him to the Jainas (if not, considering the popularity of Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava bhakti religiosity among them, to spite the Jainas)? Was it their planned 'mischief'? And why did the Jainas insult the king in the manner that they did? What had happened to their legacy of earlier stories highlighting their affirmative tradition, so to speak – the Nīli story, for instance, where they were more than willing to take a goddess / spirit 'defiled' with a history of violence and bloodshed? Was there no other way than to insult the king, in that extreme manner? The story raises many other questions, too – of changing land relations, feudal economy, a revival of temple brāhmiṇism, persecution of a caste / community. There are several layers to this story (as there are layers to the story of the 70 veḷḷāḷars who jumped into a burning pyre, which one engages with in the Nīlakeci study).Surely, the Nāyaka king being of a lower caste (as recorded) is also important.

The question as to whether the Jainas have indeed resorted to that kind of an insult or is it symbolic of their disdain for the proposal or the king, is moot. There are obviously deeper antagonisms at play in this story; and a sense of assault of some nature on the Tamil Jaina agricultural settlements or their identity as a community, at one level. At another, there is the aim / 'higher ambition' of a lower caste ruler (some sort of an oxymoron, with prestige associated with the ruling class, and 'shame' of a lower caste) aiming at upward mobility. The Jainas do have a caste status that is well known to the brahmins directing the ruler to them. They are among the 'higher' castes. From a religious community, they assume a caste identity – the king goes to them because they

belong to a higher 'caste' and not because they are Jaina, followers of the Jina dharma (which is the usual manner in which the Jaina stories take pride in themselves) The outcome of the king's anger in the story also suggests some interesting points to ponder. All of those who feared for their lives converted to Śaivism (and not any other religious sect) adorning the sacred ash, 'throwing away their sacred threads'. They assume the identity of Śaiva (nīr pūci) veḷḷāḷars or nīr pūci nayiṉārs (the Jainas who smeared sacred ash). While some in the community (Tamil Jainas) assign this latter story to the bhakti movement, most others link it to the Cenji raja story. There are many dimensions to the story that suggest mass migration (at some point), mass conversion, caste-based conflict / tension, some sort of an agrarian unrest (all the cultivators – Jainas - fleeing) , machinations of the brāhmiṇs, and an insulted lower caste king seeking a change in identity and status based on his position of authority over the region. That the brāhmiṇs did not think of a similar 'solution' to the dilemma faced when the king asked for their daughter also calls for some attention to the origins of the story. Did the story indeed originate among the Tamil Jainas of South Arcot? Or was it a Śaivite revivalist story meant to show the weakness and fear of a community which turned into Śaiva 'nayiṉārs' to save their lives? Or of a successful 'vanquishing' of the Jaina community from the region? Or, a comment on the level of insult meted out to the king? None could say where this story originated from, except that it has left an indelible impression on the Tamil Jainas in South Arcot, for whom it is their community folklore. It must have been what they told the copier or assistant of Mackenzie when they first approached the Jainas, the way they narrated the story to me. In that sense, it is historically part of the community's own perspective of its history – if with some element of

exaggeration on beheading of the Jainas, which does not seem to have been noted in any historical record. Whichever way we look at it, the story is rooted in some kind of identity crisis and conflict that occurred around 15th century (dates mentioning the cultivators and artisans unrest, the date mentioned by Thurston, and other scholars referring to this story coinciding very well). Sripal in one of his writings Sripal speaks of history writing and 'selective' history – of the victorious and not the victimised in the context of world history (in relation to the Jaina context on Tamilnadu). [298]

Seeking colonial intervention – a 20th century Record

"In 1937 the Chennai Ibrahim Company had a record on Tirujnana Sambandar. Sripal got a copy. It had songs and speeches that were abusive to Jainas. At Chennai he met some Svetambara Jaina and shared that record with them. Sripal met the advocate Lobo, gave him a translated version of the same in English. On 20th January 1937 Jainas gathered. Advocate Lobo said to them this record by the HMV Company (Calcutta) was capable of spreading religious discord." [299]

Abstract from Fort St George, Madras, Public Department Notification, Fort St George, February 9th 1937, G.O. No. 299 (public, General)
"No.3 – In exercise of the powers conferred by Section 19 (of the Indian Press (Emergency Powers) Act 1931

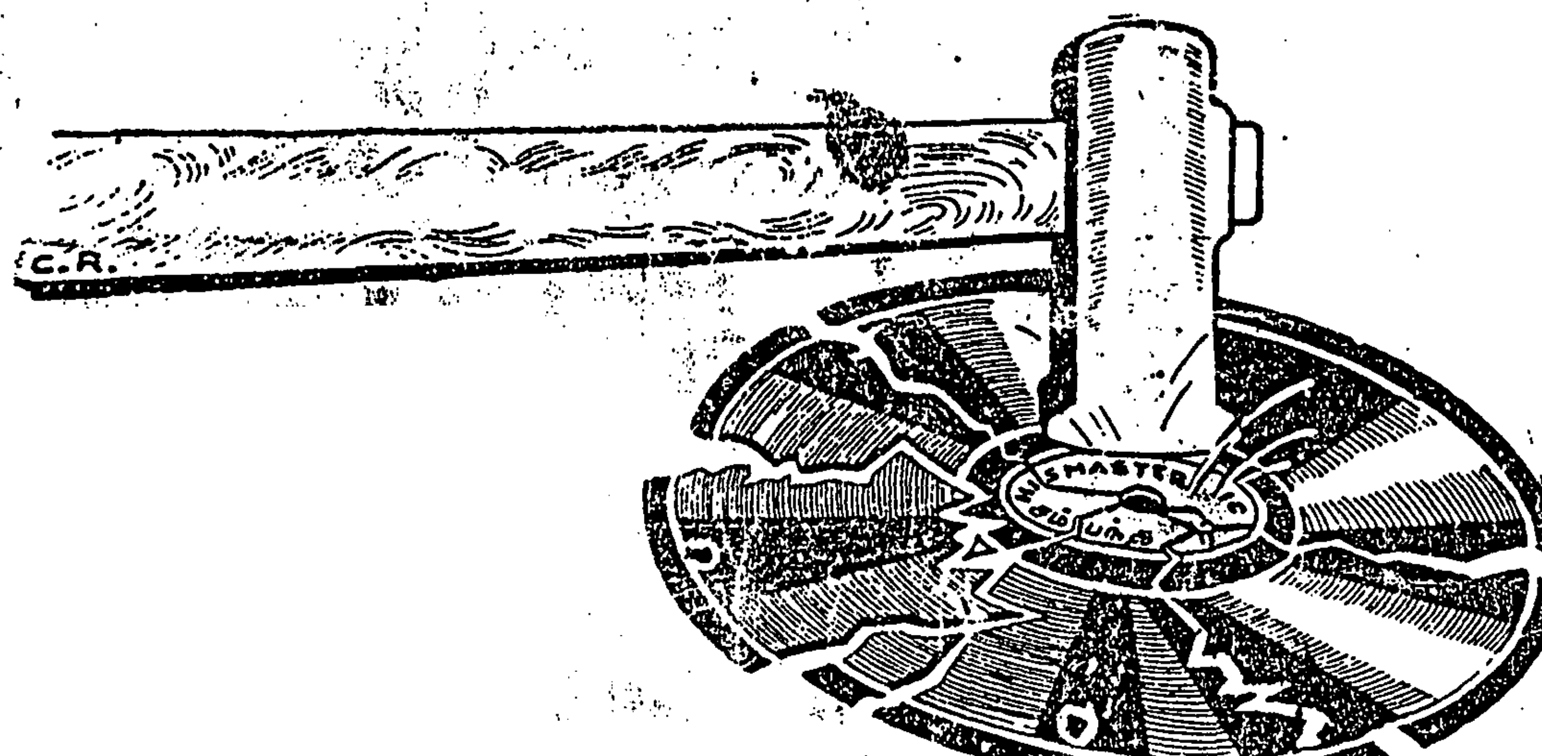
"The Governor in Council hereby declares to be forfeited to His Majesty all copies wherever found of the booklet in

[298] Jeevabandhu T. S. Sripal, Tamilakattil Jainam (Tamil), 1975; p.58-9

[299] Ka. Ci Tanakkoti Mohan Sundiran (1959), cf. cit, p.151

卐

திருஞான சம்பந்தர்



கிராமபோன் ரிகார்டுகள் பறி முதல் செய்யப்பட்டன.

Abstract from Fort St. George Gazette, Madras.

PUBLIC DEPARTMENT NOTIFICATION

FORT. ST. GEORGE FEB. 9, 1937

G. O. No. 299 Public (General)

No. 3——In exercise of the powers conferred by section 19 OF THE INDIAN PRESS (EMERGENCY POWERS) Act 1931 (XXIII of 1931). The Governor In Council hereby declares to be forfeited to His Majesty all copies where-ever found of the booklet in tamil entitled "THIRUGNANA SAMBANDAR" written by one S. Narayana Ayyar of Madras and of the set of Four Double-Sided Gramaphone Records in tamil bearing Nos N. 8422, N. 8423, N. 8424 and N. 8425, produced by his *Master's Voice Gramaphone Company*, embodying the subject matter of the said book-let and all other documents containing copies of translations of or extracts from the said book-let or Gramaphone Records on the ground that they contain matter which tends to promote feelings of enmity and hatred between different classes of His Majesty's Subjects and are consquently of the nature described in Sub-Section (1) of Section 4 of the said act as embodied by section 16 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1932 (XXIII of 1932).

(Sd.) BRACKENBURY,
Chief Secretary.

மொழி பெயர்ப்பு

பொது இலாகா அறிவிப்பு.

போர்ட் செயின்ட் ஜார்ஜ் 9-2-37

சர்க்கார் உத்திரவு

நெ 299 (பொது)

நெம்பர் 3——சென்னை எஸ். நாராயண ஐயர் என்பவர் எழுதிய "திருஞானசம்பந்தர்" என்னும் புத்தகமும் அந்தப் புத்தகத்தைத் தழுவி "ஹிஸ் மாஸ்டர் வாய்ஸ்" கிராமபோன் கம்பெனியார் தயாரித்துள்ள N. 8422 N. 8423, N. 8424, நெ. 8425 நெ இருபுரமும் பதிவு பெற்றுள்ள ரிகார்டுகளும் மன்னர்பிரான் பிரஜைகளுள் ஒரு வகுப்பாருக்கு மற்றொரு வகுப்பார்மீது வெறுப்புண்டாக்கத் தக்க வசனங்களிருக்கின்றன வாகையினாலே, இவை இந்திய அச்சுச் சட்டத்தின் 4வது விதி 1வது உள்விதிக்கும் 1932ம் வருஷத்திய XXIII வது கிரிமினல் சட்டத் திருத்தச் சட்டத்திற்கும் உட்படியாகையினாலே ஷை 1931ம்-வருஷத்திய 23வது சட்ட விசேஷாதிகாரத்தைப் பிரயோகித்து சபையோடு கூடிய கவர்னர் ஷை புத்தகத்தின் பிரதிகளையும், அந்த ரிகார்டுகளின் பிரதிகளையும், அவற்றின் எல்லாப் பகுதிகளையும் எங்கு கண்டபோதிலும் பறிமுதல் செய்வதாக உத்திர விடுகிறார்.

[ஒப்பம்] *பிரேக்கன் பரி,*
பிரதமகாரியதரிசி.

சமயப்பித்தும், சமய த்வேஷமும் குடிகொண்ட பண்டைய அரசர்கள் காலத்தில் எழுதப்பட்ட புராணக் கதைகளிலொன்றாகிய திருஞானசம்பந்தர் கதை மூலம் நமது சத்திய சமயத்தைப் பழிக்கக் கிளப்பிய திருஞான சம்பந்தர் கிராமபோன் ப்ளேட்டை பறிமுதல் செய்யவேண்டி, பாரத நாட்டின் பல பாகங்களிலுமுள்ள நமது சமயத்தவரை வரும் ஸ்வேதாம்பர், திகம்பர், ஸ்தானகவாசி யென்ற வேறுபாடின்றி ஒற்றுமையுடனும் உணர்ச்சியுடனும் புரிந்த அறக் கிளர்ச்சியால், நமது காருண்ய மிக்க பிரிட்டிஷ் அரசாங்கத்தார் நடு நிலைமையோடு ஆராய்ந்தறிந்து நமக்கு வழங்கிய ஷை தீர்ப்பின் வெற்றிக் கறிகுறியாக ஸ்ரீ பகவான் மகாவீர வர்த்தமான ஸ்வாமியின் 2464ம் பரி நிர்வாணத் திருநாளாகிய தீபாவளி தினத்தன்று தங்களுக்கு அன்புடன் அனுப்பிய மகிழ்ச்சிப் பத்திரம்.

Tamil entitled "Thirugnana Sambandar" written by one S. Narayana Ayyar of Madras and of the set of Four Double sided Gramophone Records in Tamil bearing Nos. N.8422, N.8423, N.8424 and N.8425 produced by His Masters Voice Gramophone Company, embodying the subject matter of the said booklet and all other documents containing copies of translations of or extracts from the said booklet or Gramophone Records on the ground that they contain matter which tends to promote feelings of enmity and hatred between different classes of His Majesty's Subjects and are consequently of the nature of described in Sub Section (I) of Section 4 of the said Act as embodied by Section 16 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1932 (XXIII of 1932). Signed - Brackenbury, Chief Secretary."[300]

It seems significant that on this question the Jainas sought the help of the state, and the Digambara and Śvetāmbara Jainas came together in this matter.

A Ritual Enactment of Persecution

Sripal here recounts an episode from his life, in course of his campaign against animal slaughter in temples. Sripal attended this annual Tirumulaippāl of Jñāna Sambandar celebrated at Sīrkāḻi in the month of April. . A day before this, offerings of buffalos and goats used to be made to the Piḍāri ammaṉ shrine there. Sripal, accompanied by a SPCA member (Muthukumaraswamy) went there in connection with some SPCA work. He attended the 'tirumulaippāl viḻā'. Thousands had gathered that evening. Sripal described this ritual he saw – there were six people with shaven heads, saffron vēṣṭi (dhoti), holding peacock feathers, and they stood before the utsavar (procession deity) of Jnana

[300] Refer to the copy of the order, attached.

Sambandar. Facing them were 10 Saiva devotees, who asked the former the question – in song – "what did Jñāna Sambandar say?" To which the former replied – in a song – "Samaṇa peṇkalai...." (speaking of women, Jaina women, describing each part of their body in graphic detail. Apparently Sripal started to cry listening to this kind of abusive language and a ritual that celebrated this – the son apparently formed part of Sambandar's Tevāram – Maṇṇakaṭilum'. He regrets that such a festival is celebrated to this day. [301]

A Letter to the Mahatma

I reproduce here an interesting letter written to Gandhi by a Jaina Bar-at-Law in London on the question of attack on the Jaina religious tenets in one of the issues of Navjivan by Gandhi, here, influenced by the view of Sardar Patel.

"An Open letter to Mahatma Gandhi (from C.R. Jain[302], C/ O. Imperial Bank of India, 22, Old Broad Street, London, EC – 2) [303]

Letter dated 1st July 1931

"Dear Mahatma ji,

I am distressed to read in the Navjivan in one of its recent issues your support to the sacrilegious views entertained by Sardar Vallabhai Patel concerning the nudity of Jaina saints

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[301] Jeevabandhu T. S. Sripal, Tamilakattil Jainam, pp.61-62

[302] Says he was a Barrister

[303] Jain Gazette, Vol XXVII, Nos. 7 and 8, Madras July and August[303]; pp.133 – 140. Found at the Prakrit Bhavan, National Institute of Prakrit Studies and Research, Dhavalatirtha, near Sravanabelgola, Karnataka. I thank the administrator of the said Institute for allowing for hours of peaceful reading and access to books.

and your own impolite notions on the subject. Sardar Patel is a national hero and in his won department (Satyagraha) it will be well nigh impossible to challenge his views except by a man who has put in an equal amount of self denying service. But as an athlete however excellently well trained, would not be entitled to speak on surgery and medicine, so the worthy Sardar should have refrained from expressing his opinion hastily on the subject of nudity of saints, which I am sure he does not understand in the proper way. As for yourself, you are an acknowledged great man – perhaps the most unique leader of men in the world today – but I am inclined to think that you yourself are aware more than anybody else of the fact that Jainism requires a life long study and a scientific intellectual acumen before its principles can be fully appreciated and understood. You will permit me if I criticise your views and incidentally those of the worthy Sardar in this letter...The views of the society may change from time to time, but religion is unchanging; it cannot change; if it did change it will cease to be correct and true. Today society is involved in frivolity and fun on the one side and politics and money on the other. Religion is almost ignored....As for society, are the Jains not a society in themselves? The Jains are exalted and sanctified with the nudity of the saints, they worship it. Are they to be ignored altogether? ...And what about that section of (Hindu) society who go into temples of Shiva and worship the most direct and undisguised representation of the sexual origins of the two sexes actually engaged in the act of sex gratification?...And what about the images on the dome of the great temple of Puri in Orissa, where Hindus of all classes and communities flock in millions to worship the great Jagannath? ....Is the Hindu society shocked by its naked saints and by representations of sexual union in the temples...The Hindus count something like 250,000,000 in

India. When you referred to society, were talking on behalf of these 250 millions, if not why do you ignore this vast number of men and women who act in the way described above....If you have read anything of the past history of India, you must have known that not only Mahavira, but many other teachers like Makhali Goshal and Puran Kashyap all moved about naked, and nobody was horrified and shocked...The Jaina standard of morality and ethics has come down to us from time remote that it does not pay one to cite a calculation about it; and no swarajya is worth the having which will aspire to interfere directly or indirectly therewith. The British at least when they came to India did not suggest that there going to interfere with any well established religious usage or practice. The Home Rule you are trying to obtain dear friend, begins before it has materialised, by making an article of faith that the Jaina saints should abandon their ancient practice. Do you seriously maintain that your Swarajya can be worth having under the circumstances?

Abu Qasin Geelani was one of the Muslim saints who roamed about in Digambara attire. Higher Muslim saints, called Abdals, go completely naked.... Nudity of saints was respected alike in Hinduism, Mohamadism, and also in certain other religions in eth past. I do hope dear friend that you will re consider the subject once again and recognise fully the two principles which are involved in it namely, 1. Right of every community to practise its religion unhampered and unhindered by any other community or individual and 2. The guiding policy of the state, the strength and stability of which lies in the principle of non interference with any form of religion, new innovations being excepted.

Is it asking for too much to demand that they (Jains) should be allowed to nurse their own "follies" without interference from any one? (Signed Champat Rai Jain, Bar-at-Law and life President Digambara Jain Parishad)"

Some Thoughts on Identity Construction

The reasons for conflict and contestation come from the political and economic concerns as well – land, power, in turn intrinsically linked to ideology and religious systems. While different cults, faiths, belief systems and god-concepts co-existed in Tamiḻakam prior to the 5th century AD (even during the early occupation of the rock-cut caves, natural caverns by Jaina monks and nuns). Why did it take the most vigorous form between the 7th and 9th centuries? The reasons have to be seen not merely in religious antagonism but in the larger ownership and control of resources, manifesting only partially in the nature of religious antagonism and conflict. Between the 9th and 13th centuries again, there is an effort to codify Purāṇic myths and by 15th – 16th centuries, brāhmiṇical sacred centres (in the Purāṇic pantheon) – again the centres patronised by the ruling classes – have their own talapurāṇams, treating of divine visitations and sacredness of tanks, temple lands, and so forth. While initially Jaina and Buddhist religious establishments contested for support from ruling classes (and the laity) it shifted to Jaina-Śaiva (and to a limited extent Vaiṣṇava[304]) – brāhmiṇical conflict.

The persecution stories of different time periods signify the ways in which the Tamil Jainas constructed their identity vis-à-vis the other(s). The Śaiva bhakti bards, the Cakkiḷi

[304] The Tamil Jaina community is most vociferous about saying the Śaivas were more intolerant of them than the Vaiṣṇava bards and followers.

rājā (or Cenji rājā), in few cases, also the Arcot nawab; and the anonymous person who brought out the HMV record and literature abusing them – all of them figure as the 'mainstream' / powerful others, who victimised the Tamil Jainas. When a community is in the midst of pressure and cannot confront, it finds it easier perhaps to succumb. The conversion of Jainas to Śaivism (Appar's conversion is a recorded fact) – going by the nīr-pūci-nayiṉār story – may have been partly out of fear, and partly to protect their (landed, and in some cases trading) interests and to be part of a traditions that promised to promote their interests or to protect them.

Modern scholarship (works of Sripal, Chakravarti from among the Tamil Jaina community) writing as representatives of Tamil Jaina tradition (in case of Chakravarti it was more from a liberal desire to 'modern' ideals as has been mentioned elsewhere) the issue of Jainas with a rightful share, as participants and partakers of a common history of Tamiḻakam is important. It is not just about the history of religions, but about literature and language, and political history. This scholarship comes from nationalistic, and at times, liberal enlightenment discourse and a sense of belonging to a larger universal Tamil tradition and culture. Sripal seems to tackle the Jaina identity question both by resorting to writing and publishing books, keeping acute sense of the trends in Tamil literary criticism about 'Jaina' works, organising talks and oration on Jaina literary texts, as well as by engaging with State and legislation. In the colonial period, it is with getting the colonial administration to ban copies of a supposedly abusive record on Jainas, while post independence it is to campaign for the legislation on banning animal sacrifice in temples of Tamilnadu. But the discourse on sacrifice was way different from the Śaivite

and brāhminịcal discourse. It revolved around the opinion that these rituals were instruments of oppression created by the brāhminṣ, 'misleading' the lower castes; and were, in the first place, part of a system that helped create and sustain the interests of a certain (brāhminṇ) caste. Interestingly, too, Sripal did not address Islam with this logic. And considered Islam a system with its own set of beliefs and practices.[305] This entire campaign focussed on the 'Hindu' temples in several villages in Tamilnadu.

However, this legislation (The Madras Animals and Birds Sacrifice Prohibition Act 1950) brought forth controversy and debate in contemporary times as well, and revolved around the issue of caste and cultural practices most essentially. is interesting to see that in 1930s and 40s the same campaign looked at the issue from the perspective of 'redeeming', as it were, the oppressed castes and people from 'superstitions' and 'blind beliefs' and had few advocates from among those who were at that point involved in constructing a discourse against brāhminịcal hegemony on the one hand and constructing an idea of a nation that would 'break the shackles' of ritualism and 'blind faith' it perpetrated.

It is important to look at the Dravidian movement and Self Respect movement (Suya Mariyātai Iyakkam) vis-a-vis the Tamil Jaina community in the modern context, considering that in close connection to these developments the Tamil Jaina scholars were writing about Jaina Tamil literature (Chakravarti printed his Nīlakeci with English translation in 1934; Sripal was writing a lot too) Somewhere both the

[305] In this sense, for the Jainas anything that involved killing of animals is anyway denounced in their system. While with the 'Hindus' they found spaces and ways to enter into a debate on the same with the hope of converting them (since Jainism had brought in people into its fold through convincing) perhaps they left certain systems out of their discourse – Christianity and Islam, for instance, which for them, are based in a belief that is an anti –thesis to the Jaina doctrine.

Tamil Jaina identity consciousness (rather, revival) and the discourse on Tamil as against Sanskritic culture which the Tamil purist movement , Dravidian movement and others addressing language, caste, seem to have enriched the Tamil Jaina identity discourse as also both converged at some level.

Tamil Jainas have tremendous respect and regard for Bishop Caldwell. Among the figures that they admire in history. They keep referring to Caldwell, sometimes also Ellis, Beschi (the Italian missionary) and Pope, not as much. They are aware of the contributions of these figures to Tamil language, but Caldwell is important to them. Caldwell published his A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Languages in 1856 wherein he pointed out the distinct evolution of Tamil as a Dravidian language, without Sanskritic influence / association. He in fact further asserted that brāhmiṇs had nothing worthwhile to give to the Tamil literary tradition. He also noted the contribution of Jainas to the same. Now it is not too difficult to see where and why the 'convergence' happened. Caldwell's book had also given food for thought as well as a basis for the Dravidian movement - Tamil, and Tamilness – devoid of Sanskritic influence of the north, brought in by the brāhmiṇs. This idea was the basis for the convergence. But herein also lay a critical and difficult point. That Sanskrit was perceived as brāhmiṇical, of the brāhmiṇs. But Sanskrit was also being used by the Jainas, and there could have been another way of constructing this language and literary tradition removed from its brahminical associations. But this did not happen. And was not, at that point, the central focus of the Dravidian movement and the anti - brāhmiṇ movements. Sanskrit, equated with Sanskritism in terms of ritual tradition of the brahmins was the focus of the criticisms. In the Jaina case, however, even though there was within the Jaina tradition,

use of the Sanskrit language, it was Tamil that the (Tamil) Jainas took recourse to, in constructing their place in Tamil history. They were also aware that in the case of Tamiḻakam, Tamil predated Sanskrit. And the Jaina caverns with Tamil – Brahmi inscriptions and Jaina associations gave them a firm basis for this understanding. It was not a tradition looking to the 'north' for sanction / sanctity.

Pandian says that Caldwell's "reading of the Tamil language, culture and past was appropriated by the Veḷḷāḷa elite in negotiating their new found marginality." [306] "...A number of Veḷḷāḷa elite scholars like P.Sundaram Pillai, V.Kanakasabhai, Nallaswami Pillai and Maraimalai Adigal contributed to the shaping of the early 'Dravidian' ideology..." [307] There were certain larger historical processes at work within which the Tamil Jaina identity consciousness needs to be located. In the 'Āryan-Sanskritic' – Dravidian-Tamil lay the convergence and the influence of the contemporary discourse was evident in some of Sripal's writings. For example, where he equates the Dravidian to Tamil and Jaina and calls Jainas 'Dravidian' or "Drāviḍa mētaikaḷ samaṇarkaḷ" (Samaṇas were Dravidian intellectuals); or "Ādi kāla Tamiḻ makkaḷ", or "Drāvidarkaḷ Jainarkaḷ". [308] He talks of the 'tāi moḻi' (mother tongue), and mentions P.Sundaram Pillai who was part of the Dravidian movement discourse.

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[306] M.S.S. Pandian, "Notes on the Transformation of Dravidian Ideology (c. 1900 – 1940), Social Scientist, 22, nos. 5- 6, May-June 1994 (pp.84-104); p.89

[307] Ibid, p. 89. The thought of looking at Dravidian movement and ideology happened 'late' in my course of research; essentially from the conversations on Sripal with the Tamil Jainas. The way they related to him. He was 'one among us' for them. His time period too coincided with these movements; and went until the post independence times. In his organising of numerous talks, lectures, recitation of texts, as well as part in the independence movement, also had a connection to a strong Jaina identity. But few or no scholars have touched on the Tamil Jainas and their involvement in any of these movements in the modern period.

[308] T. S. Sripal, Tamiḻakattil Jainam, 1975; p.133-135

The Dravidian movement looked at brāhmiṇism as not being rooted in the Tamil soil and the latter's constructs such as Agastya coming down to civilise the Tamil country supplemented this belief amply. The Jainas perceived themselves as part and parcel of Tamiḻakam (which they were) and hence the importance attached to the language. Both these discourses had a common 'other' to contend with. Interestingly, a veḷḷāḷa identity (Śaiva Veḷḷāḷa) – as distinct from the brāhmiṇ and other non-brāhmiṇ identities – also seems to be emerging in the Dravidian movement's discourse. Maraimalai Adigal[309] (or S. Vedachalam Pillai, 1876–1950) launched "the Tamil Purist Movement (Tanitamil Iyakkam) in 1916 which battled Sanskritic accretions in Tamil language." "Maraimalai Adigal pursued his project to a great measure, within a Western / Enlightenment framework..." [310] (and) "developed a specific sequencing of history which typologised occupations as signs of progress or otherwise."[311] And from here, what will follow – in terms of Maraimalai Adigal's perception of history and his perspective on Dravidianism, is what is intriguing and interesting from the point of view of the Tamil Jaina Śaiva veḷḷāḷa (nīr pūci nayiṉār) origin story. What one is not doing here, is to ascribe Maraimalai Adigal this category. But it is indeed interesting at the same time to find reflections of the Jaina notions of the occupational categories (as assigned by Ṛṣabha, and the reasons thereof), ideas of non-killing (koḷḷāmai) and other ideas which, the Jainas believe the Śaiva veḷḷāḷars retained even after adopting the Śaiva religion, either during or post-bhakti movement, or much later. At another level, one is also looking at how different communities in Tamiḻakam constructed different identities

[309] All points referred to him from Pandian, in Social Scientist (referred earlier), pp.84ff.
[310] Ibid, p.89
[311] Ibid, p.90

and origin stories vis-à-vis the brāhmiṇs and brāhmiṇism, and constructed a relatively pure Dravidian history. Interestingly, E.V.Ramaswamy 'Periyar' was closer to the Jaina identity question when he attached the Śaiva bhakti bards' excesses, which is supposed to have upset Maraimalai Adigal and his supporters. The Self Respect Movement in that sense, and the Tamil constructs of a history of Tamil Dravidian identity, seem to fall within a common discursive paradigm. This one will come to later. Back to Maraimalai Adigal – his perspective on the occupational origins, which is very Jaina, is like this (as Pandian notes) – "before knowing...cultivation...people lived in great difficulty without enough food and proper clothing...The, such as regime full of scarcity, hardship and other negative qualities of life, drew to a close as the Veḷḷāḷas discovered and refined the modes of settled agriculture...(and when they did that)...the murderous act of killing animals for food[312] ceased, compassion and munificence, based on sharing the surplus harvest of paddy, pulses, and other crops to the starving ones, thrived..."[313] The Jaina concepts of koḷḷāmai (non killing), non-violence, compassion and dāna (of śāstra, medicines, food,etc) can also be found in the following statement. According to Maraimalai, "Śaiva Siddhānta...had one of its central tenets non killing (read vegetarianism)...His sequencing of history developed an identity between the Veḷḷāḷas and traditional occupation of cultivation and Śaivism as the apotheosis of history..."[314]

It is important to note here an alternate construction of veḷḷāḷa identity from within that community. One is looking

[312] One may just mention in passing that in Tamilnadu today, vegetarian food / food culture is referred to as "Śaivam". In restaurants people understand 'śaivam' to mean vegetarian!
[313] Pandian, op.cit, p.91.Emphasis, wherever, mine. Pandian quotes from Maraimalai Adigal's Veḷḷāḷar Nāgarīgam
[314] Ibid, p.91

at the way multiple community identities emerged and found the need to assert themselves and their contribution to Tamil society, and history; they either converged, against a singular other, or contested with each other for their own distinct socio-cultural, political space. "Maraimalai Adigal continued to maintain the temporal distance between the Veḷḷāḷa and brāhmiṇ n terms of his teleological scheme. In other words the brāhmiṇ was the usurper of power and the power that he exercised was illegitimate. Such a construction of the self and the other was indeed a discursive means for the disempowered Veḷḷāḷas to contest the pervasive authority of the brāhmiṇ in colonial Tamilnadu."[315]

For the Tamil Jainas the 'other' were (they distinguished themselves from and felt victimised by) the Śaivas and the brāhmiṇ; and the Śaiva and brāhmiṇ identities at times seem juxtaposed, or an extension of each other. The Śaiva Veḷḷāḷas in fact were a past Jaina community (according to them) that had been victimised into entering the Śaivite religious order. On the whole, the entire discourse in this period together seems to have created a distinct Tamil cultural society sans the brahmin.

Maraimalai Adigal's perspective may be also seen as representing a community influenced by Jaina ideas. Or the Jaina influence on the vellala community can be gauged from these view points which tally with the Jaina construct of occupations, non killing and so forth; sans the Jainas' lived history of persecution by Śaiva bards, who the Śaiva veḷḷāḷas almost valorised.

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[315] Ibid, p.93

The Self Respect Movement initiated by Periyar, meanwhile, "could...address a wider range of issues by problematising a number of inferiorised identities. The newly opened up terrains of conflict was what ensured the Self Respect Movement a basis for mass mobilisation. Different subordinate social groups such as Ādi Drāviḍas, śūdras, women and labouring poor could, thus, articulate their grievances through the Movement."[316] To these sections, one might add a minority group such as the Tamil Jainas too. Perhaps it involved and engaged attention of all those groups who were building a case for their marginalisations in Tamil history and culture. In our case, the Tamil Jainas must not be seen in a vacuum, unaffected by these broader movements.[317]

Having said this (since issues such as these cannot have a well-rounded 'ending') one is carrying forward the narratives of the Tamil Jaina community, based on dialogues with them, to the chapter that delves into inscriptional records. In a sense, this present chapter addressing the community and identity, the next engaging with Nīlakeci the text, and the one following on epigraphs, need to be seen as threads of a single weave. Each has to be read in connection with the other, to make sense of Tamil Jaina history as a community. Linking up the narratives of the community to inscriptional records has a meaning to it which will be discussed in that chapter.

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[316] Ibid, p.99

[317] This idea – of looking at the Tamil Jainas in terms of these modern identity movements in Tamilnadu – needs further work. It is an idea that is being posited. Keeping in mind the amazingly little literature on this aspect, one has developed these arguments based on readings on these movements as much as (or more so) dialogues with the Tamil Jainas, and their texts.

Chapter III

Nīlakeci: Retrieving a 'Pēy' / Possession Woman

Nīlakeci [1], a Tamil text highlighting the Jaina philosophy, authored by a Jaina whose name is not known (with what we now have being a commentary version by one Samaya Divākara Muṇivar) is one of the important minor kāvyas ('ciṟukāppiyam') of the larger, universal Tamil literary tradition. The text, dated anywhere between 1^{st} and 5^{th} century AD (with some scholars also assigning it to 10^{th} and 13^{th} centuries AD, a point that will be discussed) is definitely acknowledged as a literary marvel and finds adequate mention in most treatises on Tamil literature, as much as it finds mention in all talk of Tamil literature with the 'Jaina' connection. What one does not find in adequate measure about Nīlakeci the text however, is contextual placing or analysis of the text and its significance in the history of Tamil Jainism, or Jainism in Tamilnadu? [2]

What has also been missed, almost glaringly, in all scholarship on Jainism in Tamilnadu is the richness of material on Jainism's interface with the folk / popular, that this amazing text provides. Not so much in its entire composition (which basically focuses on the philosophical debate between Jainism and other systems of thought in its period) but in its genesis and

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[1] This chapter owes itself to the long hours and moments spent with Amma (my mother who passed away), in Hyderabad and Chennai, reading, interpreting together and not-so together. As much as it owes its first 'putting pen to paper' to a chance invitation to present a paper (and a friend who insisted I do) at the Prakriti Foundation organised seminar series, "Women and Goddesses: Reimagining the Feminine in Tamil Cinema". I presented a paper titled 'Retrieving, Seeking, (An)other Woman, (An)other Goddess'. My usage of the term 'recasting', 'reimaging' Nīlakeci, through the chapter, also owes much to the seminar. To both these – the moments, and the event – I owe much.

[2] One would like to make specific note on the difference between the two terms, Tamil Jainism and Jainism in Tamilnadu. One believes that the former refers to the Tamil, localised context of the Jaina doctrine, of people who accepted the Jaina faith in the early centuries BC in Tamilnadu; and the latter to Jainism and the changes it witnessed in the course of history of Tamilnadu. One believes there is such a concept as Tamil Jainism, in the manner of a Tamil culture, Tamil idioms, and so forth.

in its context of creation.

It is this quality, and this aspect of the text and its creation that one hopes to address in this chapter. One also hopes to invite attention to the concept of, what one has termed 're-casting' or 're-imaging'. A crucial concept that will help us understand the Jaina 'responses' at given points in time in Tamil history in a continuous process of constructing, or safeguarding or negotiating its identity in an ambience of brāhmiṇical hegemony built and sustained over centuries through myriad ways.

In this sense, this chapter – for all its 'exclusive' 'feel' and, one hopes, unique theme may be seen as a part of the chapter on Identity and the Tamil Jaina community. Both in the way one addresses the question itself (of identity, per se) and as part of the larger history of Tamil Jainas and ways in which they related to the times and cultures they lived in.

Jaina Literature in Tamil: a Brief Overview

Winternitz[3] writes, that there existed a "Śramaṇa literature" (samana) literature, probably "not Jaina or Buddhist, as such....along Brāhmiṇical literature; and this śamaṇa literature treats of kings, merchants as its heroes, and not gods; and of popular tales, themes..."[4] The Jaina contribution to Tamil literature, and linguistics, has been enormous, which includes secular literature – major and minor kāvyas talking of Jaina ideals, etc; didactic works, Purāṇas (giving the 'universal Jaina history and norms for lay followers / śrāvakas and; grammatical treatises. According to Caldwell, "the largest portion of Sanskrit derivatives found in Tamil language was

[3] Winternitz, <u>The Jainas in the History of Indian Literature</u>, in Jain Vijaya Muni, edited series of the Jaina Sahitya Samshodhak Sangh, no. 2), Ahmedabad, 1946

introduced by the Jainas. They altered the Sanskrit words which they followed in order to bring it in accordance with Tamil euphonic rules."[5] That the Jainas were known to the period of the anthologies has been noted earlier.

Among the major kāvyas are Cilappatikāram, Valayāpati and Cīvakacintāmaṇi. The Cilappatikāram (3 cantos of 30 stories – *katai*), was written by Iḷanko Aṭikaḷ, brother of the Cēra king Ceñkuttuvaṉ, telling the story of Kaṇṇaki and Kōvalaṉ, hailing from two prominent merchant families. This work has been dated by some as early as 2nd century AD (some say it was part of the Cañkam works), but the generally accepted date is 5th century AD. Valayāpati is not said to be available in its full form. Around 50 verses of this work were published in Śeṉ Tamiḻ (a Tamil journal) in an early issue prior to 1920. This work talks of the lives of Jaina monks.[6] Cīvakacintāmaṇi, said to have been composed between 8th and 13th centuries AD, is said to be based on the Sanskrit treatises, Kṣatra Cūṭāmaṇi and Gatyacintāmaṇi. It has been authored according to tradition by one Tirutakkattēvar – not identified historically – of the Chōḻa country. He is said to have studied all the early Cañkam works and gone to Madurai to attend one of the Cañkams. There he was challenged by non-Jaina writers and poets to write an erotic work, which according to them, was an anomaly for Jainas. He first composed a short quatrain, called Naṟiviruttam, based on a jackals' story from the Hitōpadeśa, to show his teacher. When the teacher was convinced he was capable he gave permission to Tiruttakkattēvar to compose the Cīvakacintāmaṇi. Cīvakacintāmaṇi was said to have won great praise of both

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[4] Ibid, pp.7-8

[5] Caldwell, <u>Comparative Grammar of Dravidian Languages</u>, III edition, p.85

[6] A recent publication was Srichandran, ed, <u>Maṇimekalai, Valayāpati, Kuṇṭalakeci: Mūlamum, Teḷivuṟaiyum</u>, Tamil Nilayam, Chennai, 1996

Jainas and non Jainas. Cēkkiḻār is said to refer to the same in his Nāyanār Purāṇam.

Among the minor kāvyas the more important is Nīlakeci (which will be dealt with in great detail in section ii of this chapter) – composed around the 5th century AD (date still debated). The author of this text is not known, but we only know of the commentator, who is one Samayadivākara Vāmana Muṇi. Nīlakeci is styled after the Buddhist text Kuṇṭalakeci. The other minor kāvya is Peruṅkatai (after the Sanskrit Bṛhatkathā of Guṇāditya) of 5th- 6th century AD written in the Paiśāci language by a certain Koṅguvel, supposedly a petty chieftain of Koṅgunāṭu. This work deals with the life of Udayanakumāra, king of Vatsadeśa. Then there is the Yaśotarakāvyam, written by an unknown Jaina teacher / monk, and deals with morals; besides two didactic works called Nāgakumārakāvyam and Cūlāmaṇi.

Kaliṅkaṭṭupparaṇi is seen as an exemplary work of the Jainas on war. It is a long verse on the battle of Chōḻa Kulōttuṅka with the Kaliṅka rājā of the north.

Among the other didactic works are Nālaṭiyār and Paḻamoḻināṉūṟu. Nālaṭiyār, a work of 400 quatrains in 40 chapters, has an interesting anecdote about its genesis. Around 8,000 Jaina monks had once visited the Pāṇḍyan kingdom when famine had struck in their former place of residence. The allusion is to the famine in Magadha; or could also be a metaphor justifying the Jaina migration. After the famine ended they wished to go back to the place they came from. But the king would not give them permission to do so since he did not want to lose people of such eminence. The monks suddenly left in the middle of the night, leaving one quatrain each for the king. The next morning, when the king learnt of this, in anger

he threw each of these quatrains into the Vaikai river and 400 of these swam back against the current – which were collected around 470 AD. These quatrains mention the Kalaprā Muttaraiyars. Pope has referred to it as "veḷḷāḷar vēdam" (the veda of the veḷḷāḷar community). One of the quatrains refers to the Jaina – Brāhmiṇism conflict (quatrain 243).[7] Palamoli Nānūru (400 proverbs – palamoli) written by a Jaina king of Munrurai – perhaps a feudatory of the Pandya kings. P.B. Desai alludes to a tradition from Mahābalipuram, which shows that members of the Kurumbar community (from an early period) of the area, Munrurai, were followers of Buddhism and Jainism. The Kurumbars were a community of shepherds or hunters and petty chiefs.

Among the grammatical texts are Nannūl, written by Pavananti (12th century AD), a lexicon, Cūṭāmaṇi-nikaṇṭu by Vīramaṇṭala Puruśa, a disciple of Guṇabhadra ācārya of Tirunarunkoṇṭai (Tirunarunkunram – an important early Tamil settlement, and today a place of a Jaina āśrama) in the time of Krisnadevarāya of Vijayanagara. It is interesting to note that between 11th and 12th century AD, there was profuse output in grammatical Tamil (Jaina) texts. Perhaps one of the reasons could be the realisation among these Jaina authors of the significance of producing texts in the local Tamil language as opposed to the hegemony of Sanskrit, and of brāhmiṇism and its hold over the temple and ritual paradigm. Jaina grammatical texts signify an interesting secular tradition. In this connection, one may mention that a 10th century AD Jaina text, Prabhācandra's Nyāyakumāracandra [8], rejects the "absolute authority of Sanskrit in an obvious effort to bolster the position of a community whose scriptural texts and liturgy were composed in

[7] M.S. Ramaswami Ayyangar, Studies in South Indian Jainism, reprint edition, Sathguru Publications, Delhi, 1982; p.57

dialect."[9] Moreover, Prabhācandra says, "contrary to brāhmaṇ supposition, dialect is based on an ordered system of grammar and does not reflect a state of linguistic anarchy."[10]

Another point of importance (related to a regional linguistic tradition) is that the region around Madurai (and Madurai itself) has been a most common site of reference for all ideologies and polity that prevailed. The Jainas themselves talk of the mulasangha, which was established around 5th century AD. There was then, a consistent contestation for Madurai, and around Madurai – as also the literary tradition that it produced – between the Jainas, Buddhists, Śaivas and Vaiṣṇavas over a long period in Tamil history.

Meanwhile, another important component of Jaina literature, the Purāṇas, were composed between the 8th and 10th centuries AD. The more important among these, for the Digambara tradition (the Śvetāmbaras composed 'caritras') in Tamiḻakam were the Ādipurāṇa of Jinasenā (about 8th century AD) and Mallisenā's Mērumantarapurāṇam. Jinasenā's Ādipurāṇa outlines the characteristics of a Purāṇa, which should comprise (according to this purāṇa) of kṣētra, kāla, tīrtha, satpuṁśa, viceṣṭita – highlighting the one who rules over the worlds, holy places, over asceticism and so on. One has already mentioned that the Jaina Purāṇas gave importance to specific histories, with specific beginnings, and culminations of the years and days of the tīrthaṅkaras. This is related to the Jaina concept of sacred centre – these are places where the tīrthaṅkaras were born, or were initiated (into asceticism), gained omniscience (kēvala jñāna), and attained nirvāṇa. These four main events in

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[8] An edited volume of the same exists – edited by Mahendrakumar, Manikchandra Jain Granthamala, vols. XXXVIII, XXXIX, Bombay, 1938

[9] Paul Dundas, "The Digambara Jain Warrior", in Michael Carrithers, Caroline Humphrey, eds, The Assembly of Listeners:Jains in Society, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991; p.171

the lives of the tīrthaṅkaras are termed kalyāṇakas. These sacred centres, tīrthas, have two categories – siddha kṣetras (or nirrāṇa kṣetras) and atiśaya kṣetras, the latter (in its terminology itself) suggesting 'extraneous' involvement, since these are 'made sacred', lent sacredness to – the temples, shrines, etc. In this sense the Jaina purāṇas, unlike their brāhminical counterparts, do not speak of tīrthas which are associated with divine visitations, or in other words, the supernatural has no role to play in creating that sacred space. The place becomes sacred / revered only in terms of its association with an extra-ordinary individual who successfully 'crossed over the ocean of this world' – the ford maker, the tīrthankara. A powerful tīrthankara controls, by virtue of his kēvalajñāna (supreme knowledge), and in turn, is also presided over by, a yakṣi some of whom figure in brāhminical mythology.

The Jaina purāṇas have also re-interpreted, in terms of their own cosmogony, the epics – the Rāmāyaṇa and the figure of Kṛṣṇa. In the Jaina story of Rāma (he is Padma here) – the Padmapurāṇa – Lakṣmaṇa slays Rāvaṇa (who is the Prativāsudeva of Jaina cosmogony) and suffers in hellish misery, having to undergo a period of repentance (for the killing). Lakṣmaṇa, like Kṛṣṇa, is among the Vāsudevas, a group that has to undergo some pain before redemption, to finally gain liberation from the cycle of births and rebirths. Sītā, interestingly, is depicted as the daughter of Maṇṭotari and Rāvaṇa. Since Rāma's image as the benevolent, righteous monarch is the overwhelming one in the larger non Jaina tradition, the Jainas carefully adopted his figure to spread the basic tenets of Jainism, like ahiṁsā and aparigraha, by making him a Jaina adherent. On the other hand, Kṛṣṇa – with am

[10] Ibid, p.171

ambivalent status even in the brāhminical system[11], has to purge himself of his sins. It is probable that the sensuality associated with this figure and his many associations with women as part of his overall conception may have been one reason for the Jaina reticence towards him; and instead, his brother Balarāma gets a superior status as a Baladeva.
In this tradition of re-interpretation is another text called Kahākoṣu (Kathākośa) written by Śrīcandra, in Apabhraṁṣa language. In this text, Kārtikeya, disgusted at being the son of his own grandfather Agni, is said to have turned ascetic. A lake was created around him when he was in meditation, and anybody who bathed in this lake could get rid of disease[12]. It may be noted that this imagery of the lake as a cleansing phenomenon occurs in almost all 'Hindu' purāṇas. In case of Murukaṉ – later identified with Kārtikeya, son of Śiva, from an originally hill / forest deity – there is a constant reference to the *śaravaṇa poikai*, the lake that destroys all sins and disease.

At another level, the tīrthankara Ṛṣabha is spoken of in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa (in the southern version of the same) as a descendant of Manu, fifth in the generation from him. Ṛṣabha in other places is also referred to as an avatara (form) of Viṣṇu. In the Tamil Jaina tradition, it is widely believed that the concept of Śiva is actually a take-over from that of Ṛṣabha. The mount Kailāśa, the identity of a mendicant in penance, the imagery of the vehicle, the bull, being similar to both.

The scriptural language of the Jainas in the pan-Jaina tradition, was ardhamāgadhi and Prākrit was also used. In the Tamil (Digambara) tradition, Jaina Sauraseni was also used, besides

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[11] The allusion is to the episode in the Mahābhārata regarding the curse on Kṛṣṇa which consumes the whole Yadu clan, for having destroyed the entire Kaurava clan.
[12] Friedhelm Hardy, 'Information and Transformation: Two Faces of the Purāṇas', in Wendy Doniger, ed, Purana Perennis, SUNY, 193, p. 167

Tamil. Sanskrit was used for debates with other systems. But in Nilakeci Tamil is used for the same purpose. An important aspect of a textual tradition is the audience it addressed. Given the Jaina storytelling tradition and that the Jaina textual tradition precluded a receptive audience (in this sense, the Jaina texts could not have existed *a priori*, impervious to a social context), there are hardly any studies on the 'dialogue' of these texts with the laity. "A text", as William Graham mentions in a different context, "becomes 'scripture' in active subjective relationship to persons, and as part of a cumulative communal tradition." [13] Text, therefore, cannot be seen in isolation from the context. And, scripture is a "relational phenomenon" [14] and the response to it must be an important concern. [15]

In a similar vein, John E.Cort places the Jaina text (specifically the Kalpa Sūtra) within two categories – 'canon near' and 'canon far'. In the canon near concept, "the primacy and authority of the text is defined by praxis and resultant contextualised understanding"[16]. Further, he points out that a canon-near "changes with time and place, and authority flows from the accumulated tradition into the texts." [17] He is talking in the context of the ritual reading of the Kalpasūtra among the Śvetāmbara mūrtipūjak Jainas of Gujarat. In the canon far text, on the other hand, "primacy and authority (are) located in some intrinsic ontological value of the text themselves..." [18] and these texts convey "fixed and closed authority, vectored via the

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[13] William Graham, Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion, Cambridge University Press, 1987, p.5
[14] Ibid, p.7
[15] Few aspects about the way the Tamil Jaina community relates to some of their scriptural tradition were taken up in the chapter on the Tamil Jaina Community.
[16] John Cort, 'Śvetāmbara Mūrtipūjak Jaina: Scripture in a Performative Context', in Jeffrey Timm, Texts in Context: Traditional Hermeneutics in South Asia, SUNY, new York, 1992, p.175
[17] Ibid, p.175
[18] Ibid. p.175

texts". However, these two categories are not mutually exclusive and one text can exhibit both these characters. In our case, then, perhaps, the minor kāvyas are canon near, and the Purāṇas the canon far. But Cīvakacintāmaṇi, a major kāvya also displays the canon near qualities, when one looks at its intrinsic relationship with the Tamil Jainas. As also the Merumantarapurāṇam.

In this larger context of Jaina literature, and Jaina literature in Tamil, one is zooming in on a text that exists in an interesting location, neither as a "canon near' or as a 'canon far'. It is not a purāṇa with its hold of authority over the Tamil Jaina community. It holds a sort of 'ambivalent' position in this context – much like its protagonist, Nīlakeci, in her former identity as Nīli, the dreaded possession spirit of Tamilnadu, or Tamiḻakam. It does not claim the same place as Cīvakacintāmaṇi. But written in Tamil, for a Tamil audience, with the intention of highlighting the Jaina-non Jaina debate and discourse, Nīlakeci holds an important place in larger, (more than the necessarily 'purely' Jaina) context – broadly, in the history of Tamil literature and the Jaina community response to historical, social contexts And why is it so, will be clear from the discussion that follows in the following section.

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Section 1

Nīlakeci: Retrieving a Pēy

Scene a[19]

"paṇṭu toṭṭu iṉṟu varai inta poruḷ lor payamāykkūṟum
caṇṭāla nīliyeṉṉum cāmuṇṭi isakkiyaruḷ
koṇṭu atiyeṉ avaḷ kataiyai kutūkalamāypātumentaṉ
aṇṭaiyile niṉṟavarum veku āṉantamāyk keṭkaccolvēṉ"[20]

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[19] 'Scene'-a,b,c- are merely meant to introduce the different versions of Nīli story used.

[20] Su. Shanmugasundaram, edited, Paḻayaṉūr Nīli (henceforth PN)-Viḷḷuppāṭṭu version, published by Kodumudi Shanmuga Biragadam, Tinnevelly, 1978. I thank Venkatesh Chakravarty for this reference, and

"I narrate this story that has for all times (from then until date) caused fear; the story of caṇḍāla Nīli, the cāmuṇḍa isakki (yakṣi)."

Scene b

"paḻutilavaṇikaṉuyir parittavanāḷ
vēḷāḷar eḻupatiṉmar
erimuḻuki yiṟakkacceyta
ā ā paḻayaṉūr nīlikatai pāramītināṉpāṭa
aḻakumayil ēṟivarum āṟumukavaṉ
tuṇaiye jeya jeya"[21]

"I sing (of) Paḻayaṉūr Nīli, who took the life of the merchant (as revenge) and (consequentially) the 70 veḷḷāḷas jumped into a pyre. May the six headed one (Ārumuka-Subrahmaṇya) be my guide. Salutations to him."

Scene c

"āynīla vuṇka ṇavaḷāytañ kāmai ceyyum
pēynīla kēci periyoṉṟañ koṇṭa piṉṉait
tīnīla vuḷḷañ tirintēru tiruvat talāi
mañāla mellā maramāṟṟiya māṭci yalā."[22]

"Consider this (the story of) the uncontrollable (aṭañkāmai) pēy (demon / spirit) Nīlakeci, on being bestowed the right knowledge by the great muṇi (periyoṉ)transformed from her natural self full of poison and fire (anger)to one possessed f knowledge and righteousness".

Our story, then, is about Nīli, the *pēy of Paḻayaṉūr*, Nīli, the

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Roja Muthaiah Research Library, and Theodore Bhaskaran for the kind permission to utilise the only available copy of this Villuppattu in their library.

[21] Nīli Nāṭakam, author unknown, date unknown. Folk theatre version. From copy at RMRL Chennai. Title page missing. From collection of Roja Muthaiah of Kottaiyur, Ramnad district.

[22] Po. Ve. Somasundaranar (henceforth Po.Ve.So) ed, Nīlakeci (Tamil), South India Saiva Siddhanta Society, Tinnevelly, 1973; 'avaiyaṭakam':verse2.Translations, wherever (unless otherwise mentioned) interpretive, mine.

uncontrollable, vengeful possession (woman) spirit; as it is about her 'movement' from this pathos ridden past to that of a Jaina philosopher, Nīlakeci. Who is Nīli – Nīlakeci and what is her story, that seems to trigger such an interest and by extension, numerous folk and non-folk versions in different periods in Tamil history?

I shall place here all the versions that I discovered of the story of Nīli of Paḻayanūr in Tiruvālaṅkāṭu of ancient Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam (in North Arcot district) of Tamiḻakam.

The Villuppāṭṭu version of Nīli Story (the genre and the background)

This may be called a wandering tale since the author is not known. It is a wandering tale in terms of being open to interpretations, additions, deletions – but definitely with a firm base over which these changes could be made. The villuppāṭṭu comes in the genre of a performative ballad and in that sense, an audience, a performative context and space are important elements for this genre, as also, the villuppāṭṭukkārar (the performer / storyteller). In case of the Paḻayanūr Nīli story, it is supposed to have been performed in the Isakkiyammaṉ temple of Paḻayanūr village during a summer festival (kōḍai viḻā) sometime in the months of March-April.[23]

Speaking of how this version came to light, Shanmugasundaram informs that he procured the Nīli story in the form of a handwritten manuscript from the Villukkārar (bow singers) of Kanyakumari district, by name Ishak and

[23] Shanmugasundaram, ed Paḻayanūr Nīli Nāṭṭuppāṭal (henceforth, P.Nili), Kotumudi Shanmugabiragadam, repr. 1973., p.3

Kannanceri Shankaranarayanan. In the edited version which one has referred to here, according to the author, one finds the author comparing the handwritten manuscript and a 1934 published version called Muppandal Isakkiyamman Katai (story) , highlighting similarities and differences. It may be mentioned in this connection that the village Muppandal (which has a temple apparently dedicated to this Isakkiyamman where they also have a tradition of singing this story) has had a tradition of Jaina settlements there.

The Story and Structure

The Villuppāttu narrates the story in small sections / divisions devoted to each character of the story. The characters are introduced to the audience, as it were, with brief descriptions of each, the story flows through each of these characters. This version begins with the character description of the courtesan Candana Nañkai who is the most important character in this Nīli story.

A brāhmin named Nambi, priest at the temple at Ponnūr[24], falls in love with a dāsi (Tamil for courtesan) named Cantana Nañkai, a beautiful woman. He evades all his duties as a temple priest and splurges wealth on her. The dāsi's mother realises in due course that Nambi is nearing bankruptcy and would be of no use to her daughter. One day she sends him away on the pretext that her daughter is unwell and will not see him. Nambi promptly returns with medicines etc for Cantana Nañkai. But this time he overhears the mother of the dāsi commanding her daughter not to entertain Nambi anymore, as he would soon be a pauper. An angry and dejected Nambi leaves the place in a huff. In the meanwhile, Cantana Nañkai, who is in love with him, seeing him leave thus, runs after him, and entreats him to return and

[24] Verse 101, p.8, PN Ponnūr is also famous for its Jaina association. Today one can find a shrine dedicated to Valluvar author of the Kuṟaḷ at Ponnūr, and also a few Jaina āśramas for the laity and monks nearby.

ignore the statement made by the mother. She pleads with him to stay with her as she cannot think of another in his place. In this while, Nambi, who has been reflecting on the loss of face at the temple and fearing loss of his job as a priest hits on an idea. His eyes fall on Cantana Nañkai's bejewelled body and he immediately thinks of a way to get richer without having to work. He desires not just the jewels but also revenge for the insult meted out to him by her mother. An unsuspecting and innocent Cantana Nañkai, in the meantime, in an intimate moment, lays her head on his lap and falls asleep. While she is thus asleep, Nambi removes the adornments off her body, and before running away from the place, smashes her head with a boulder lying nearby, leaving her dead. Meanwhile, Cantana Nañkai's brother (sent by her mother) comes looking for his sister in the forest where this scene has just occurred. Seeing the smashed face of his sister, the brother, angry and distraught, smashes his head against the same boulder. Before killing himself he prays that he be granted the boon to avenge his sister's murder – *"paḻikkuppaḻi vāñkuteṟku pagavaṉē aṟuḷvēṇum..."*

Meanwhile, on the way back, after selling Cantana Nañkai's jewels to a goldsmith, Nambi trips on a stone and dies of a snake bite himself.

The three of them are reborn. Their second births are described in the section 'maṟuppiravi vaṟalāru'[25]. The courtesan and her brother are born to the wife of a Chōḻa chieftain / king (Chōḻamaṇṇan) as twins, while Nambi is reborn as the son of a Cheṭṭiār pawn broker of Kāveripūmpaṭṭinam. The brother sister duo are named Nīlaṉ and Nīli respectively, while the Chetty's

[25] Interestingly, the song writer mentions Chitragupta (Citraputra nāyaṉār) who decides (makes 'calculations') on the fates of each of these characters,

son is named Ānaṉtan. Nīlaṉ and Nīli, however, are not 'normal' children and actually retain an element of the 'pēy' in them as they have both died unnatural deaths in the previous birth. They are normal children by day and assume pēy form by night, with the longing to eat flesh. They finish off almost all the cattle and livestock of the village in this manner. Naturally there is chaos and the people seek their father, the chieftain's intervention. The father gets to know, in the course of time, that it is his two little children who are responsible for this calamity and, sad though he is, he orders them to be banished to a forest. Nīlaṉ and Nīli are left by the trunk of a neem tree in a forest.

On a certain day, the people of Paḻakaṉaḷḷūr (the place name alternates in different versions as Paḻayaṉūr and Paḻakaṉaḷḷūr) fetch the neem tree for constructing a temple at their village. They are unaware of the presence of Nīlaṉ in its hollow and they realise this only after the tree has been brought to the temple site. Out of fear the priest of the temple conducts a homam (ritual) and burns Nīlaṉ in the ritual pyre. Nīli, who gets to know of this, is seething with anger and promises to avenge the death of her brother in due course – since her first 'victim' would be Nambi of the past birth. In the meantime, the Ceṭṭi's son Ānaṉtan has grown up. One day he decides to leave for Paḻakaṉaḷḷūr to sell gold and precious stones and help his father in his business. His father dissuades him from going there as soothsayers had foretold that this place is the nemesis for Ānaṉtan. Ānaṉtan, of course, allays their fears and proceeds. But he is given a special dagger to carry with him for his safety. The viḷḷuppāṭṭu version describes ominous signs (that would forewarn audiences of what was coming next) – for instance, new pots breaking to pieces, a blind man crossing Ānaṉtan's

based on their respective karmas – *"avarkaḷuṭa kaṇakkeṭuttu aḷavākaṭṭāṉ*

path, and so forth.

As he walks past all these and into the forest stretch between Kāveripūmpaṭṭinam and Paḻakaṉaḷḷūr, Nīli catches up with him, as destined. She is a beautiful maiden, and seems to be lying in wait for him. She is described thus –

"kaḷḷiyanta nīli kaṭuncinamāy vaṉamalaiyāy
oḷipiranta cevvāyum uyarnta kumiḻ mūkkaḻakum
telintoru kuḻaiaḻakum cīrpuṉainta nakaiaḻakum
kuḷirnta mukaccuntariyāy koḷainīli toṉṟuvaḷām" [26]

...Dangerous as the *kaḷḷi* (splurge) plant, bitter with pain and anger, bright as the vermilion-hued sun rising over forest and mountains, one of a beautiful nose, soft, tender neck, adorned with expensive jewellery, a woman of a pleasing and soothing appearance, the vengeful Nīli (koḷainīli).

In the forest, Nīli addresses Āṉantan as "*attāṉ*"[27] . She gives him the feeling she has been waiting for him for long. On his enquiring as to how she, a beautiful woman, is waiting alone in the forest, she tries to remind him she is his wife. Āṉantan understands, by this time, that this was the nemesis that the soothsayers spoke of, his death at the hands of a pēy – Nīli. There is an extended conversation between the two in the viḷḷuppāṭṭu. Āṉantan walks quickly ahead, in an effort to reach Paḻakaṉaḷḷūr, fearing for his life. Nīli, too, follows. By now she has assumed a form of a woman with a child and reaches Paḻakaṉaḷḷūr. There she pleads with the village veḷḷāḷa elders to restore her husband to her. She weaves a story as to how he, ensnared by a courtesan, has left her and her child to their fate. She asks them to make him see sense. Āṉantan tries to convince

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pārtāṉ... "and places them in different women's wombs.
[26] 'Nīliyin Tōṟṟam', v. 279-282, PN
[27] A term peculiar to the larger south Indian social custom of consanguineous marriages wherein attan denotes cousin and husband at the same time.

the veḷḷāḷas, in vain, that she is a pey and not his wedded wife. The veḷḷāḷas ask him to spend the night at the village temple with her and the child and assure him nothing untoward will happen They also give word to him that were something happen to him, as he feared, they would all give up their lives by jumping into a burning pyre.

Nīli and Ānaṉtan are made to spend the night in a room (maṇṭapam) within the village temple. Here, having cleverly disposed off the dagger that Ānaṉtan carried to protect him, Nīli kills him and drinks his blood. And to ward off the veḷḷāḷas who are lying in wait outside trying to be protective, Nīli sings a lullaby to the (non existent) child. Interestingly, the lullaby is full of hidden meanings and metaphors that reveal what she is up to.

For instance –

"paccai paccai niṟattōṉē
pāl vaṭiyum mēṉiyōṉē
ucciyile pūttōṉē uṭampeḷḷām pāmalāṉē
....mulniṟainta mēṇiyōṉe...
nīlaṉ maṟumāṉē....
cittiraiyil piṟantavaṉē ceṭṭiyineṉcil pōykiṭṭāḷ
pōtumaṭā oṉ ācai – eṉ puṇakkam tīrntataṭā..."[28]

Addressing her non existent child – "One of green colour, with body oozing with milk (refers to the splurge plant which oozes a white substance which is poisonous[29]).....one with body full of thorns (mul niṟainta)... nephew of Nīlaṉ (Nīli's brother who is

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[28] v.497 to 508 . PN pp. 22-23

[29] The plant has been in news often when there was a spate of female infanticide in Tamilnadu, where the newly born female child was fed with this 'milk' from this plant and left to die. It is interesting that Nīli refers to the splurge plant as her child – considering she is a pēy. In normal connotation 'pālvaṭiyum mēṇi' as a term is used to refers to a fair and soft skinned body , but here, since Nīli describes the child to begin with, strangely, as one of green colour – 'paccai paccai niṟattōṉē' she

killed when the neem tree he resides in is burnt) ...one born in the month of cittirai, it is enough to reach (perhaps here she means tear through) the ceṭṭi's heart, to fulfill your desire and my (desire for) revenge..."

After having killed Ānantaṉ, Nīli is ready for her second revenge, for the death of her brother Nīlaṉ. She assumes the form of an old woman, mother of Ānaṉtan and comes to the village looking for her son. The veḷḷāḷas by this time have learnt of the murder of Ānaṉtan. The 'mother' breaks into a long *oppāri* (dirge sung on death of a person, a practice still followed by some communities).The 70 veḷḷāḷas, true to their word, jump into the fire and give up their lives.But Nīli's fury does not end there. She now proceeds to destroy the whole village, assuming different forms.

Thus – *"kiḻavi kumari āṉāḷ...kumari tayirkāri āṉāḷ..."*[30]
"The old woman became a young woman, the young woman turned into a curd seller..."In this form she sells poisoned curd to the village womenfolk and kills them.

In this version, unlike in other versions, the revenge of Nīli assumes dramatic proportions, with her ending up killing everyone – remotely, indirectly, and directly - connected to her past and immediate life story. The womenfolk, for instance, have no role to play in the death of Nīlaṉ, her brother. The idea is to portray the unbridled and uncontrollable anger of Nīli, which is capable of consuming all that came in her way. Nīli is the pey to be dreaded by all. This kind of revenge, it may be noted, is also present in the Kaṇṇaki story where she burns down a whole city of Madurai for the lapse in judgment by the Pāṇḍyan ruler who orders death sentence on her husband on

essentially compares the child with the poisonous green plant with milk like substance oozing from its body / leaves.

[30] PN, v.567; 573. p 25

charges of stealing. In the case of Nīli she is constructed as a dreaded pey to be remembered by generations after her story has been 'played'. Nīli must be a larger than life figure. A wronged woman forced to become a pey seeking revenge for the wrong done. "*Nīli naṉaittatē muṭittāḷ*"[31] "Nīli accomplished what she set out to."

The viḷḷuppāṭṭu does not end with the revenge of Nīli. After completing her task, Nīli prays to Śiva *(Īśaṉ)* and he commands

her to be a 'good' woman henceforth and return to the village / nāḍu and help people who seek her help –

"nāṭṭinile iṉi ceṉṟu nalla kuṇacīliyeṉa
tiṭṭumuḷḷa uṉ aṭimai tēsattār taṉai yaṭuttu
vāṭṭaminṟi avarkuṟaiya tīrttālvāy pō veṉṟār"[32]

Śiva tells Nīli – "go back to your country (nāḍu) as a virtuous woman, helping those who seek your blessings; address their grievances and relieve their suffering."

The viḷḷuppāṭṭu ends thus with an everlasting dimension to the story –

"aṉṟu mutal iṉṟuvaṟai ammaiyavaḷ
palavuril niṉṟu nammai kāttuvāṟum nīlamaiccoḷḷa veṉṟāḷē
oṉṟāḷum muṭivatalla cittamārē ulakōrē
naṉṟāka yivaḷkkataiyai nāltōṟum pāṭuvārē."[33]

"And so, till date, the goddess / mother (ammai avaḷ, i.e Nīli) protects us, people of various villages...good people sing (of) her story forever."

Nīli's story in different sources; another Jaina Nīli story

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[31] Ibid, v. 574
[32] Ibid, v. 580-583; p.25
[33] Ibid, v. 583 – 6; p.25

One may digress a bit here to point out that there were / are several versions of the Nīli story in Tamilakam at different periods. One would come back to more details on this, but here are a few examples to be quickly mentioned including one Jaina story of Nīli, where the Nīli is quite different from the pēy Nīli of Nīlakeci.

The Nīli story appears (with minor variations) in the Tamil textual tradition, besides of course the Jaina Tamil text where her past is mentioned only as a pey but the story is not given. Tevāram, Tiruttōṇṭarpurāṇam, Kamba Rāmāyaṇam, Periyapurāṇam, Tiruppugaḻ, Cekkiḻār Piḷḷaitamiḻ, Toṇṭaimaṇṭalacataṭakam, etc are a few of these.[34] Besides, a story of one Nīli appears also in the Jaina Sāmantabhadra's Ratnākaraṇṭaka Śrāvakācāra [35] and Prabhācandra, the commentator of the work narrates the story of this Nīli – a devout Jaina married on the sly to a Buddhist, Sāgaradatta and later, learning of the decent, taking out her 'revenge' by serving Buddhist bhikkus their leather footwear.[36] She has to face allegations of being unchaste (by her enraged husband and father -in-law). As it happens, the gates of this city of Bṛgukaccha close all of a sudden and in the king's dream a deity appears to say only a chaste woman can open the gates by her touch. But naturally, Nīli becomes that woman and the husband takes her back once her chastity is proven. The husband and father-in-law start adhering to the Jaina faith.
Sāmanthabhadrācārya, incidentally, was a Jaina monk who lived in Jinakāñcipuram in 2nd century AD and that is the period of this story, according to A. Chakravarti. But, he says, "here Neeli is distinctly a human being and has nothing to do with the

[34] PN, p. 27. As noted by editor Shanmugasundaram.
[35] A. Chakravarti, Neelakeci, 2nd edition, Prakrit Bharati Academy, Jaipur, 1994 (originally published in 1936)
[36] One would get back to this very common motif – namely, feeding leather slippers – in south Indian folk stories – and the pollution by being married (always on the sly) to a person outside the caste / community in the course of discussion in this chapter.

Neelakesi of Pazhayanur..." [37]

Chakravarti offers his analysis on the Nīli stories appearing in the Śaivite traditions and the Jaina Nīlakeci. "...the Kāli temple of Pazhayanur must have been a very old well known place where animal sacrifices were offered to Kāli. Probably as result of Jaina influence the Kāli temple was converted into a place of worship according to Jaina doctrine of ahimsā. The story of Neelakesi evidently suggests some such reform..." [38]After a few years, he confers, during the Śaivite revival period this temple, "reformed by Jaina teachers" was "taken over by Śaivite reformers and the goddess of the place elevated to the status of Śiva's consort, still retaining the old name Neelakesi translated into the vernacular of the Dravidian people as Vandarkuzhali which term is one the synonyms found in our work denoting Neelakesi." [39] The reason for this being Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam, where Pazhayanur is situated, "was completely under the influence of the Jainas...The Śaivite reformers had to contend against the opposition of the Pallava king of Conjeevaram who was a staunch Jaina and who evidently wanted to stem the tide of Śaiva reformation...." [40]

Vijaya Ramaswamy notes that "the story of Neeli occupies a whole trope of literary genre ranging from ballads and tales to the dramatic poetic form known as Viḷḷuppāṭṭu and the folk theatre... (And)...the versatile Neeli goes through a range of imaging from a prostitute to a proselytising Jain nun to the saintly Shaivite Nāyaṉār 'Pēyar' (of Kāraikkāl)...Neeli at the social level represents reprehensible social and moral behaviour but continues to exist in the religious psyche of the south Indians, predominantly the non Brāhmaṇical, largely

[37] A. Chakravarti, op.cit, p. 17
[38] Ibid, p.19
[39] Ibid, p.19

Dravidian groups, as a figure to be feared and worshipped.."[41]

Nīli viḷḷuppāṭṭu

Coming back to the story of Nīli which we noted, in the viḷḷuppāṭṭu version, there are some noticeable changes in the printed version (published in 1934) from the handwritten manuscript story one narrated earlier. Some of these are highlighted here. [42] The printed version does not give the name of the courtesan (Cantana Naṅkai). The courtesan is referred to as "*vilaikkeṭukkum muṟaikkāri vēcai*" (meaning prostitute – mentioning her vocation) in the handwritten manuscript and as "*kūttāṭum muṟaikkāri*" (dancer / courtesan) in the printed version. The lullaby she sings for her (non existent) child is also different in each.

Thus- in the handwritten manuscript it starts as "*paccai paccai niṟattōṉē, pāl vaṭiyum mēṉiye...*"whereas in the printed version it begins with "*vīṭṭile piṟakkāmaḷ veṭṭavaḻiyil piṟantāne*" (later translated roughly as one not born in a home, but by the wayside).

After taking her revenge of the former life's lover, Nīli's inclination towards god (Śiva) and the latter sending her back to the earth to protect the righteous is only seen in the handwritten manuscript and not in the printed version used by the editor Shanmugasundaram.

[40] Ibid, p19.
[41] Vijaya Ramaswamy, "The Metamorphosis of Aḷḷi and Neeli: Folktales and Mythic Images of Tamil Women", in Vijaya Ramaswamy, ed, Re-searching Indian Women, Manohar, Delhi, 2003, pp.163-171. I thank Prof. Vijaya Ramaswamy for directing my attention to this work which looks at the general image of women in south Indian myth and folklore. A point needs to be made here that there is yet lot that is not said about the internal transformation of Nīli within the Jaina story Nīlakeci against the socio-cultural backdrop (the Veḷḷāḷar 'suicide' motif, for instance) in her work, which is, anyways not the focus of her attention. Her work looks at incorporations and transformations of folklore in an overall 'little' and 'great' traditions point of view.
[42] PN pp.34-35.

In the printed version it begins with
"vīṭṭile piṟakkāmal
veṭṭavaḻiyil piṟantāṉē..."
Loosely translated it goes, "(my child) not born in a home, but out in the open..."

After avenging her former life lover, Nīli's inclination / move towards Śiva ('īśaṉ') and he in turn commanding her to go help people on the earth is specific to the oral and handwritten manuscript version alone. Importantly however, in the printed version, Nīli asks people of the village (after her vengeance) to build a temple for her at Muppandal. She protects Paḻakaṉaḷḷūr. This is not mentioned in the handwritten manuscript. Both the versions however are in compliance with the fact that the deity Nīli protects Paḻakaṉaḷḷūr.

An interesting element in the performative tradition is a prose rendition after the song is sung, by some of the balladeers. According to Shanmugasundaram, only a few viḷḷukkāṟars add this to their performance at the end. What is important for us, though, is the implied meaning in his (prose) version of Nīli – which obviously, gives a brahminical rendering to her story and is a later interpretation to the oral narrative (and thereby added to the performances) by a few singers, not all.

This prose text[43] is as follows –
'Today Nīli resides in Paḻayaṉūr, but at a certain time in the past, she saw a temple priest diligently offering prayers everyday. Nīli accosted him and asked him to offer prayers to her. The priest knew of her prowess. So he placed the thorn of the strychnine tree (*kaḷḷi*) on her hair to control her power and

[43] Shanmugasundaram, PN, p.38

her arrogance. Nīli tried a lot t but could not remove these from her hair. She transformed herself into a maiden and began to work in the priest's house as an obedient house help. The timing was just right, as the priest's daughter had come home just then for her first delivery. Nīli befriended the daughter and looked for an opportune moment. One day, she requested Cūḷi (the priest's daughter) to remove lice from her hair. Cūḷi, on seeing the thorns in her hair, asked Nīli what to do with those. Nīli requested her to remove the thorns. Cūḷi did as she was told – since these were hard to remove, she removed them with her teeth. Soon as this was done, Nīli became a demon again and killed Cūḷi and her child in the womb, and ate it. The priest returned to see this horrible sight and decided then and there to build a temple for Nīli, humbly accepting her power, and also to protect others from her anger. Ever since, Nīli has been propitiated in Paḻayaṉūr.'

According to the author, the Iśakki ammaṉ temple at Muppandal is in front of the temple dedicated to Nīli as the goddess here has bloodied teeth and is shown with a child at her waist, perhaps symbolizing Nīli.[44] Nīli worship here, he believes, could have changed in later periods to Iśakki worship.

The 'site' of the Nīli (the possession woman / spirit; and story) is Paḻayaṉūr, near Āḷaṅkāṭu in the north Arcot district. Now this the Āḷaṅkāṭu of Tevāram (Śaivite) hymns. It is surrounded by brahmadēya and agrahāra settlements (as evidenced from a few inscriptions found in connection with a Śiva temple in the area). By extension, a brāhmiṇ(ical) context surrounds the site. It may be important to analyse this site a little more. It is virtually a 'no-man's land - as almost all other versions that are concerned with the Nīli story (the Viḷḷuppāṭṭu, the Tevāram

[44] Ibid, p. 27

version, the Nīlakeci text) mention the area as such. It is perhaps a tract of scrubland or a patch of forest between two places - two villages, or a village and a town. That is the site where the spirit (Nīli) dwells.

It is intriguing that in almost all Tamil folklore, or tales of possession sprits, the pey, the spirit (almost always a woman) dwells in this kind of site, an in-between land. Why is this site always connected to that which is dark, sinister, pathos-filled, and evil? Is there an alienation built into this kind of a construct? To 'keep-out-of-bounds-? But looking at it in another sense, it is also a place for 'transcendence' - from one form to the other. Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār transforms (in the same kind of site) into a saint from a (chaste) housewife; Kaṇṇaki goes through a similar 'transcendence' (though not in this above manner) in this kind of site - in fact her separation from Kōvalaṉ has a lot to do with this kind of a site. Kuṇṭalakēci, the wronged princess, too, goes through a transformation from a murderer (of a cheat-husband) to a Buddhist nun in a place such as this - a mid-way land. In fact, the site itself can be seen to have an equivalent of 'pālai' ecotype of Caṅkam poetry - a place that does not have as specific a characteristic as the other ecotypes such as muḷḷai (pastureland), or marutam (agrarian). It is a place that travellers pass through; and metaphorically, a 'movement from or towards'.

The importance of this site also lies in the fact that precisely for this reason it becomes a place that gives to the notion of getting control of. The folklorists who keep the stories of these sites (and hence the site itself) alive also, perhaps not incidentally, belong to a certain rung of the social order, mostly the last rung. The site of the folklore, then, interestingly becomes 'their' site, the one they relate to, which is the periphery - of land tenure, ownership, resources, temple,

brāhmiṇical religiosity, too. Much of the ambivalence of the site, and the darkness of the tales, comes from this connection as well. Hence, in an obviously brahminical version of the Nīli story, as written about in the Tevāram hymns, 'control' of Nīli becomes a crucial element. Metaphors of control abound. And not incidentally a temple to the consort of Śiva is also built in this site and the priest finally controls Nīli, the pēy. It is also the site where Śiva dances his 'cosmic' dance to defeat (in an obvious male gesture) Kāḷi, and this 'humble'. her. Control of the mythic folkloric element is perhaps just the subtext.

In the Nīli case it is not merely suppression of a wandering tale, a wandering woman / possession woman, but also a form (the viḷḷuppāṭṭu genre and its social base) in some sense, which both the Tevāram hymns and the Jaina text Nīlakeci do, although in different ways, In the Jaina text, a possession spirit of a popular folklore is given an affirmative voice and a character of a philosopher while in the Tevāram works, she is ultimately brought under control by a priest and remains, yet, an ambivalent figure, not completely suppressed, but not as dominant as she was supposed to have been in the Nīli story.

As for us, this story suggests a sense of conflicts between a certain kind of organised religion – temple worship and a priest refusing to propitiate a local goddess and a folk cult. The motif of putting thorns on the head of a woman deity / or pēy shows an obvious attempt at controlling – controlling either the sexuality and the prowess of a powerful local, fearsome, vindictive goddess or the powers of the local cult itself. There is also implied prejudice as to who is to be propitiated and who should not be. Nīli's ambivalent nature is obviously not welcome in a religion that the priest belongs to. Interestingly, his daughter is named Cūḷi (another name for the mother goddess in the Tamil country). However it is clear that the

popularity and local acceptance / acknowledgement of Nīli have far overpowered that of any goddess in that particular region to be 'controlled' for long. The story's end – which is at once cruel and fearsome – speaks of what ensues for those who do not recognise her powers. And what is feared, is to be worshipped, as the priest realises. And this Nīli becomes a deity - one of the many village deities – of Paḻayaṉūr worshipped and feared (or worshipped because she is feared). The relationship between Cūḷi and Nīli and the removing of the thorns from her hair with her teeth also signify elements sexual and intimate, falling in line with a series of stories of folk goddesses and their women devotees in Tamilnadu, where the relationship between the woman (devotee?) and the goddess are intimate and very often even a male companion (perhaps husband) are not given / allowed space in the relationship and in fact often cause a certain kind of discontent and tension between the husband and the wife (or lovers). [45] Though an analysis of this phenomenon is out of the purview of the present chapter, it is a matter that requires further exploration.

Nīli Nāṭakam (yet another Nīli story)

This version comes from a printed copy – the author, date, place of publication, etc are missing – discovered at the Roja Muthiah Research Library (RMRL) at Chennai, and is one of the numerous personal collections of this scholar patron from Tamilnadu. This version, and the PN incidentally are the only two copies of the Nīli story available today in printed versions. Nīli Nāṭakam, as the title suggests, is another text meant for performance. It is structured like a detailed full-length play with each character and scene described with extraordinary detail, something missing in the viḷḷuppāṭṭu version – the latter

[45] The Tamil goddess films show this kind of tension – but usually in a fixed, patriarchal mode, and hence under explore the inherent meanings of sexual intent or sensuality, in different cases.

being based on an oral narrative; and perhaps for a shorter ritual performance. Nīli Nāṭakam is also about a woman turning into a 'pēy', Nīli in her second birth and avenging her murder by killing the man in question. Only, unlike in the previous version, Nīli here is not a courtesan in her previous birth, but the wife of a brāhmiṇ priest. Nīli Nāṭakam, right at the beginning, sets a context – which may its performative context, or the context / site / setting of the story – the Ekambaranathar temple in Kāñcipuram. The entry of the characters, one after the other, happens only after the dharmakartā (kaṭṭiyakāraṉ, the caretaker) of the temple has arrived and is honoured with an impressive eulogy, which begins thus – "*kaṭṭiyakkāraṉ vantāṉ, ciṅkāramāka kaṭṭiyakāraṉ vantāṉ*".

Nīli Nāṭakam itself begins with invocatory verses to all the major gods and goddesses – ārumukaṉ (Subrahmaṇya), Tirumāl (Viṣṇu), Pārvati, Mahālakṣmi, Śiva , Saraswati and the 'great people' / great 'souls' [46] Interestingly, it does not begin with the invocation to Gaṇeśa, who is invoked later on, with an entire śloka to devoted to him. After the invocatory verses is the maṅgalam section, where again gods and goddesses (including Nīli) are offered prayers. The entire Nīli Nāṭakam (NN henceforth) is set to Carṇātic rāgas and tālas – each character's entry and each part of the story is set to and sung in a particular rāga also mentioned in the text.

In the verses the singer seeks blessings from gods and goddesses to sing the story of Paḻayaṉūr Nīli who is described variously as one responsible for the death of the 70 veḷḷāḷars and her vengeance on the merchant; as one whose fame has

[46] Very interestingly, it also offers salutations to Subrahmaṇya Bharati, the Tamil poet. Perhaps as a performative genre, these were included as a ritual. Inclusion of Subramanya Bharati means little else than this particular version was performed (adapted) in the times of the Tamil poet.

spread far and wide and was continuing to do so; besides every other characteristic feature of her story.

The story in NN goes like this - The priest of a temple, married, squanders all his wealth on a courtesan (here neither the courtesan's nor his, or wife's names are mentioned).Fellow priests complain to the dharmakartā of the temple asking this priest to be thrown out as he is failing in his duties to the temple. The priest, meanwhile, sends his wife away to her mother's place in Mayilāpūr (in present day Chennai) and continues his 'wayward' ways. In this version, the courtesan pleads with him to spend time with his wife and asks him not to send her away. But he does not heed her advice. Meanwhile, the temple caretaker asks him to leave his job, unless he was willing to bring back his wife and stay with her, leaving the courtesan. The priest has no other way but to bring back his wife to get his job back. He goes to Mayilāpūr, tells his wife he plans to begin a new life with her, and asks her to return. Her parents do not trust him though and hence send her brother along with her on their journey back to Kāñcipuram. His wife, meanwhile, is pregnant with the priest's child. On the way back towards Kāñcipuram, in the forest, the priest sends his brother-in-law to fetch some water to drink. And in this time, with the sole objective of taking all f his wife's jewellery, he starts off an argument. He questions her on her pregnancy and accuses her of un-chaste behaviour. In a fit of anger he strangles her and pushes her into a well, after snatching her jewels away. He then goes to meet the courtesan with these jewels. But she throws him out. Dejected, he walks away, only to be bitten by a snake and he dies.

Meanwhile the wife's brother, seeing the plight of his sister,

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And perhaps the natakam used the concept of invoking apart from gods, goddesses, the prominent people of the times.

takes his own life as well. The siblings are re born as Nīli and Nīlan̲ to a couple called Sabhāpati Mudaliyār and Paccaiammāḷ of Paḻayan̲ūr, after several prayers and offerings to various gods. Similarly, the brāhmiṇ priest is re born in the house of Nāgendra Cheṭṭi in Kāñcipuram. Their birth is made an extraordinary event in this version, with both the women bearing these children (the siblings, and the brahmin priest) after long hours of labour. In the case of Nīli and Nīlan̲ (the twins) the mid wife actually praises her prowess to their mother, saying she had delivered similarly many great children, such as Indrajit (Maṇḍōdari and Rāvaṇa's son), Śakuṇi and Duryōdhana and that more the labour pain, more illustrious the children.

"kēḷum paccaiammāḷ inta kar̲panoyku nī payappata vēṇṭām. nānen̲n̲a lēcānavaḷā? anta rāvaṇan pen̲ṭāṇṭi maṇṭōtari intiracittanaippper̲r̲akalāttilum anta kāntāri turiyōtan̲an̲ mutalāna nūr̲r̲uvarai pper̲r̲a kālattilum nāntān maruttuvam pārttēn̲. antanālētān avvalavu yōkiya piḷḷaikaleḷḷām

pir̲antārkal nalla vegumatikaḷum per̲r̲ēn̲...."

"Paccaimmāḷ, do not fear this pain. I am no weak woman (I am not just an ordinary woman). I have watched over (as mid wife) Rāvaṇa's wife Maṇḍōdari bringing Indrajit into this world; and also been there when Śakuṇi was born. I helped Gāndhāri with her hundred babies, including Duryōdhan̲an̲. That is why they all turned out to be such illustrious men! I also brought into this world many illustrious women..."

In a sense the story teller, or playwright, uses some satire here – all the characters mentioned here happen to be ones associated with negative qualities more than positive ones. All of them turned out to be infamous. This lays ground for the audience to presume what kind of offspring would be the twins the mid wife his helping Paccai ammāḷ with. Until this time, the

description had centered on Paccaiammāḷ and her husband offering several prayers, conducting yajñas for being blessed with an offspring. Finally Paccaiammāḷ gives birth to Nīli and Nīlaṉ. At the other end the priest is born as Dinakara Cheṭṭi. Again, after many prayers and ritual offerings to brāhmiṇs, etc. When the brāhmiṇs cast his horoscope they predict his death by the 'pēy' pf Paḻayaṉūr. But of course they find a solution too – a yajña to procure a special dagger that would protect the boy. But were he to place the dagger facing the north (where Paḻayaṉūr is located) at any point of time, the pēy would consume him.

Years pass. Nīlaṉ and Nīli are growing up. Even in their child form, the siblings are creating havoc in the village, as every night they kill the livestock of their village out of hunger for flesh. The villagers manage to find out this and complain to their father. The father asks the children to be left in a forest, and as in the villuppattu version, here too, after being thus left, Nīlaṉ gets killed and Nīli takes revenge on the villagers).

Dinakara Cheṭṭi (the priest) in this version gets married and has a child. One day he decides to go to Paḻayaṉūr for business purposes. His wife – with their child - accompanies him till some distance, but he leaves her by the side of a lake in the forest while she is asleep as he does not wish to cause her inconvenience of a long journey. Nīli, who has been wandering about, waiting to get her revenge, accosts this woman and her child abandoned in the forest thus and questions her. She realises her husband is the one she is seeking to kill. She thus takes Dinakara Cheṭṭi's wife and child back to their home in Kāñcipuram, and on eth way back to Paḻayaṉūr, assumes the form of his wife, produces a child by her powers, and rushes towards Paḻayaṉūr to get her revenge.

Within no time she has caught up with Dinakara Chetti in the midst of the forest. She chides him for having left his wife and child alone in the forest and gone ahead. Chetti finds it unbelievable that his wife should catch up with him so soon. He is suddenly reminded of the prophecy of the brāhmins about his death at the hands of the pēy, and he is scared. He rushes to Palayanūr. Nīli chases him, and on reaching Palayanūr, her entreaties to the village elders (the 70 vellālars) follows – as in the other version though here she has assumed the name and form of Chetti's spouse. The elders (Mudaliyār here) direct Chetti to stay with his wife and promise him in case something untoward happens, they would – the 70 of them – jump into the pyre. Importantly here the village to which the 'mutaliyārs' belong is given – adding to the number 70. That is, they were 60 from the village Ālaṅkāṭu, 10 from Mottūr.[47]However, in the same text it says 10 from Palayanūr.

"...ivvitam pulampukinra cettiyārai ālaṅkāṭu mutaliyār arupatupērum mōṭūr mutaliyār pattupērum āka elupatupēr mutalimārumterri anta nīlīyuṭanai alaittukkoṇṭupōy avvūrkāḷi kōyilukkullē viṭṭukkatavai velippūrrum muṭikoṇṭu ivarkaḷ ullai enna pēsukinrārkalō ataiyari yavēṇṭum anru ūrkarkum talaiyarikaḷ pattuperaiyalaittu avvalayattai currikkāval vaittu...."

[In this way – in order to assure the Cetti – 60 Mutaliyār of Ālaṅkāṭu and 10 of Mōṭṭūr together comprising 70, took Nīli (and the Cetti) to the Kāḷi temple in that village and locked them in a room within the temple. They stood outside in

[47] Interestingly, Mottur near Arani is also a Jaina settlement. In North Arcot district. Today there are very few Jainas living there. One of the more prominent among them being the storyteller – narrator of Cīvakacintāmaṇi – called Cintāmaṇi Nāvalar. Details in the chapter no the Tamil Jaina community. Could these 70 have been Jainas? Considering that most Tamil Jainas in this region were Mutaliyar, and names of villages mentioned here have Jaina associations.

protection – were something to happen, to be ready to give up their lives and keep their word...."]

Nīli meanwhile continued to live in her role as Ceṭṭi's wife, knowing fairly well the village elders were outside. In the viḷḷuppāṭṭu version she sings a meaningful lullaby to an imaginary child. Here she calls out to the mutaliyārs saying all is fine now, the Ceṭṭi is about to go to sleep. The mutaliyārs, happy with the state of events, retire to their homes. Soon thereafter Nīli assumes the demon form and with her sharp teeth, bites into the Ceṭṭi's throat.

She assumes the form of the Ceṭṭi's mother and blames the mutaliyārs for the murder. True to their word the mutaliyārs light a pyre and jump into the flames.

The Two Versions of Nīli Story: a Comparison

Both the texts are meant for performance. But the audience aimed for the two is totally different. One of the ways to know that is the obvious reference to the Ekāmbaranātha temple precincts in Kāñcipuram as a place of worship in the Nīli Nāṭakam text. The viḷḷuppāṭṭu is performed in smaller, local village shrines and most certainly has a different kind of audience, with different cultural symbols incorporated in the performance.

Each character, and the scene, is described in detail. There is a fair amount of moral discourse to, in the NN. For instance the dāsi reminds the priest of his 'dharma', asking him to be with his wife and pay her (the dāsi) an occasional visit –

"..kēḻīr pirānanātarē.... vēroruttiyai vaittukoṇṭu avaḷutaṉē vāḻntiruppatu orukālattilum tarumamalla....atu uḷakattiṟ pērumpaḻikkum manamnōkkāmal avaḷōtuncantōcamāy vāḻntiruttu ovvoruvēlai ennitattilum vantu pōvatu

caṟṟōkkuṭaya tarummāyiruppatuntavira eṉakkum umakkum apakīrtikkum iṭamillātirukku kuṟukkaḷē..."

[It is not 'dharma' to leave your wife and spend all the time with me. It will do you and me a lot of good if you spend time with your wife and pay me an occasional visit to avoid bad name for both of us.]

In the viḷḷuppāṭṭu version there is the love aspect (love of the courtesan for the brāhmiṇ). There is the stress in this version on brāhmiṇical ritualism – like the performance of yajña and hōmam to beget children (which both Nāgendraceṭṭi's wife and Paccaiammāḷ go through in order to be blessed with children. The brāhmiṇ priest's wife takes a vow on paṅkuṇi *viḻā* (festival celebrated in the month of April – March) at her parents' home in Mayilāpūr for her husband to come back to her. Patriarchal value systems abound in this text. For instance, an argument wherein the brāhmiṇ priest tells his wife to stay behind since women cannot walk so easily in the forest and find a way out from there easily.

While in the viḷḷuppāṭṭu version the Cheṭṭi does not get married in his second birth, here he does. Perhaps NN also aims to portray it as a mighty tragedy for more innocent people (the Cheṭṭi's wife and child for instance who are introduced in the NN version and have no role to play in the viḷḷuppāṭṭu. The viḷḷuppāṭṭu's essential focus is on Nīli (who returned as a goddess on earth) the feared and (hence) worshipped 'pēy'. While in NN the revenge itself is seen as a cruel event (in terms of the words used to describe it) and the 70 mutaliyārs jumping in the fire seems to be the more important event. Even this incident is described in shades of awe, pity and sadness. Besides, here Nīli does not leave even the womenfolk of Paḻayaṉūr, and kills them with poisoned curds (that she sells to them in the form of a curd seller) – an aspect altogether missing

in the villuppāṭṭu song. Somewhere Nīli Nāṭakam portrays the pēy with some amount of disgust – she is pey at her cruelest. While villuppāṭṭu Nīli has some empathy forthcoming and subtle veneration, as a pey that had avenged a wrong done to her. The wronged woman in the villuppāṭṭu version is the dāsi herself (who does not evoke the disgust and contempt shown to her in Nīli Nāṭakam) who was done to death cruelly. She is not the wife of the priest, as in the Nīli Nāṭakam version.

There is a fair amount of valorising of events and personalities in Nīli Nāṭakam. The mid-wife has to be the woman who has supervised the birth of major mythological characters (very importantly of characters with negative shades) such as Indrajit, in the Rāmāyaṇa, son of Rāvaṇa, Suyōdhana (Duryōdhana), of Mahābhārata. Both Cheṭṭis' respective wives suffer labour pains for inordinately longer duration and both deliver their respective babies in their tenth month. The NN seems to be in the manner of a Greek tragedy – every event is awesome. There is no such intonation in the Villuppāṭṭu version, which is simpler.

There seem to be several 'extra-textual' elements in the NN – in terms of incorporating elements not part of the folklore of Nīli. One says this, assuming the folk tale as 'the text' with its complete story. The narrative revolves around a lot of 'other' things than Nīli and her pathos filled story by itself. In NN all these 'there' / 'extra' elements – the moralising, the rituals, the temple – are important inasmuch as the Nīli story merely fits into this well made structure of a tragedy / play. It could, in other words, be the story of any other folk / mythological character fitted into the same structure. In this sense, NN may be considered a codified, structured performative tradition inhering brāhminical values and mores. The villuppāṭṭu is a wandering folk tale, of Nīli (also performed / performative) ,

a local persona later deified, familiar to the area around Tiruvāḷaṅkāṭu and Pal̲ayan̲ūr, and may be few other villages in the north Arcot district, depending on how far the tale travelled. Interestingly, in the viḷḷuppāṭṭu version of Nīli story, the 70 who jumped into the pyre are mentioned merely as 'ūrār' and their caste is not mentioned.

The common motifs in both (or all) versions of Nīli story (one has touched on) or events connected with Nīli, however, are the following: the sacrifice of 70 of Pal̲ayan̲ūr by jumping into the pyre; the murder and revenge of Nīli; in all versions, the brāhmiṇ (priest) is re born as 'chettiār' and perhaps is has something to do with his 'act' in a previous birth that gives him a definitely 'lower' caste status in the next birth. In all versions again, Nīli has supernatural powers. She is feared hence worshipped. It is quite interesting that in the Viḷḷuppāṭṭu version the courtesan Cantananaṅkai and her brother are reborn to a Cōl̲a queen, or wife of a vassal in the Cōl̲a kingdom. The term used for him is merely, Cōl̲a maṇṇan, without a name. There is also the instance of the two pēys – Nīli and Nīlan̲, her brother – eating up all the livestock of the region.

Further discussions on the versions, the Nīli story and Nīlakeci follow in the forthcoming sections.

Nīlakeci: Nīli in the Tamil Jaina text

The author of the text is not known and we only know about the commentator, Samayadivākara Vāmana muṇi. According to Chakravarti, this commentator, Vāmana Muṇi, "lived about the time of Bukkarāya of the 14th century..."[48] The text itself is

[48] A.Chakravarti, Jaina Literature in Tamil, Bharatiya Jnanpith Publications, New Delhi, 1974 (originally published in 1941 by Jaina Siddhanta Bhavan, Arrah); p.119

meant to be a counter to the Buddhist text Kuṇṭalakeci, in that it uses the concept of philosophical debate and polemicising with non Jaina systems, in the same manner as non Buddhist systems in Kuṇṭalakeci. But the story and the way the author constructs the text is distinct.

The genesis of the text, as the author, reveals right at the onset, apparently, lies in a dream where a deity (whose name is not mentioned) appears in the dream urging the author to write this text. The story, then, is part of what occurred in a dream. The site is the land of Pāñcāla (Pāñcāladeśa), ruled by king Samudrasāra, whose capital city was Puṇḍravardhana – in Tamil, Puṇṭaravaruttaṉam. Now, on the outer fringes of this city was a cremation ground called Palālayam, with a Kāḷi temple in it. A Jaina monk, muṇi, named Muṇicandra was doing penance in this place. He saw several people of the villages nearby bringing goats and sheep for slaughter as offering to the goddess Kāḷi. He accosts them and tells them there is no utility in sacrificing the lives of these creatures. He dissuades them. But the people, who listen to him, are afraid it might evoke displeasure of the goddess. And they might incur her wrath as a result. He gives them an alternative, namely to offer in sacrifice clay models of goats and sheep or other creatures they wish to offer as sacrifice. This he says would please the goddess and also save the lives of these creatures. Convinced, people adopt this practice thereafter. The goddess Kāḷi, however, is upset with this turn of events. She decides to enlist the help of pēy Nīli of the south: -

"ācu miñkiruñ tiṉiyeṉṉai eḻukaveṉ ṟayala
kāci nāṭṭinuñ ceṭiya nāṭṭinuñ kāṇu
tēcañ tāmpala tiriyavat teṉṟicai nīla

kēci mātaivam talaippaṭuk kīlarntiṉṉa vuṟaikkum"[49]
'What is use of being here (so thinking) the goddess (of the temple) searched in the Kāḷi and Ceḍi land and other places.

And finally, asked the goddess (mātaivam) of south (teṉṟicai – teṉ ticai) Nīlakeci (note that it does not say Nīli, but Nīlakeci) to stop this (new process started by the muṇi).'[50]
On reaching the cremation ground Nīli first tries to scare the muni in many ways. But he does not budge from his penance. She then assumes the form of Samudrasāra (the king)'s beautiful daughter, princess Kamalekai and tries to act coy, in order to seduce him.

"kāmalekai tan nuruveṭut tiruvenat toṉṟit
tāmañ cāñtutaṉ malariṉṉa palakoṇṭu tuṇaicāl
cemañ kāvala cevaṭi pōṟṟeṉac ceṉṟāḷ."[51]
'Assuming the form of Kāmalekai, adorning the best of jewels, flowers with lovely fragrance....she approached the muṇi (ceṉṟāḷ)...'[52]

Muṇicandra, however, tells her he is well aware of her real form. She is amazed at his ability to stay so peaceful amid all her efforts to seduce him, and trying to scare him. She now wishes to learn from him as to how he is able to be so peaceful and calm. He teaches her the basic tenets of Jaina doctrine. He also makes her understand the futility of adding to her bad karmas by scaring people and being a despised one as a result. He teaches her the three Jaina ideals of narkāṭci (right faith); naloḻukkam (right conduct), and nanñānam (right knowledge) as the means to get rid of the pain and bondage of saṁsāra (this life /

[49] Po.Ve.Somasundaranar, ed, Nīlakeci (Tamil), South India Saiva Siddhanta Society, Madras, 1973 (hereafter Po.Ve.So), v.44, p. 41.
[50] Not literal translation.
[51] Po.Ve.So, p.49, v.59
[52] Not literal translation

existence). He advises her to avoid causing pain and hurt to living beings, and teaches her about koḷḷāmai (ahiṁsā). He also briefs her about other Jaina concepts such as the senses – living beings with one, two, four, six senses and so on (āyiyaṟivuyiru – beings with five senses); and of the three worlds inhabited by god, human beings and various middle level beings – Nārāyaṇas, vāsudevas, vyantara devatas, and so forth. Nīlakeci, now truly transformed, converted, decides to spend the rest of her life propagating Jaina doctrine. Importantly, it is her decision. She tells the muṇi if she could leave her way of violence and vengeance because of this doctrine, she considers it important to help others do the same. She wants to put an end to her bad karmas accumulated over the years as a pēy:

"...*pēyeṉ ceyta piḻai yellām*
poruma poṟuveṉ ṟiraiñcinā!"[53]

'She prayed to the muṇi saying enough of the misdemeanours committed as a pēy...'[54]

It is then that the monk Muṇicandra gives her his blessings to propagate the message that he has shared with her among others.

"*uytal vāyurait tāyatan melu*
muyiruḷḷiṭ tapala vuḷporuḷ coṉṉāy
naitaḷil lātteli vōṭunan ñāna
nāṇuñ koṇ teṇuṉ naṟkuṇa meḷḷām
pēytuṭan tāy piḻait tērkini tāvar
pirāyaccit tamperi yōyaru leṉṉc
ceyta tīmai keṭakkaṭa nāṭṭiṟ
cinava ṟanneṟi yeteruṭ teṉṟāṉ"[55]

'Hearing that, (Nīli) sought blessings from the muṇi, saying, 'great one, I have attained a life that is desirable, having

[53] Po Ve So, p. 102, v.134
[54] Interpretive translation,mine.
[55] Po.Ve. So, p. 111, v.148

entered your realm. You have enlightened me of other matters as well. I have forgotten my own (earlier) self in this enlightening and right knowledge that I am blessed to have received. (Moreover) you have showered upon me your goodness, shown me a way to expiation of my bad deeds. Hearing that the muni directed her to go to the world (people) drowned in worldly mire and spread right knowledge of the Jina (cinavaraṉ-neṟi).'[56]

And thus begins Nīli, the pēy's journey of transformation; into the realm of philosophical / metaphysical discourse and debate. It has been a long journey for a woman forced to become a pey , a possessing spirit, vindictive, murderous; or a deity feared, hence venerated, to a woman challenging the various philosophical / religious systems of that time – the Buddhist, Ājivika, Vaiśeśika, Vedic, Bhūtavāda (Materialistic) and so forth. From a 'scene' where Nīli tore the flesh of the Ceṭṭi who had murdered her in the previous birth: "*ceṭṭiyārmēl viḻuntu veṟikoṇṭu paḷḷināl toṇṭiya paṟṟikkaṭittāḷ...*"[57] *(pouncing on the ceṭṭi she sunk her teeth into his throat and bit him...)* to one of humble submission to the tīrthaṅkara at the jinālaya:

"*yā aṭikarulal aruṅtuya rakalvakai yatanāṉ*
mā atuṭai. aṭi yivaitā
maravale ṉṉaivalankoṇṭu
vela taṭaviyaṉ malaimēl
virīkatir maṇiviḷak kāti
tī itaṭutalai viḷankuṅ cinakara mulakaiyiṟ ceṉṟāḷ"[58]

'Being blessed (thus) by the muṇi (aṭikaḷ / respected one) she entered with joy (into the realm of) the worship of the Jina at the excellent mountain Veḷḷimalai, lit with brightness (a halo)

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[56] Lose translation, mine.
[57] S. Shanmuga Sundaram, ed, PN, Vp version, lines 520 – 524 , p.23
[58] Po.Ve.So, op.cit, Section Dharumavuṟaiccarukkam, v.149, p. 112.

of gemstones, that (cause to) put an end (to) pain and suffering of living beings.'[59]

Nīli –Nīlakeci is now 'possessed' of the thirst for knowledge and philosophical rumination, as it were, and an urge for a higher plane of existence. And one will try to assess this long journey and see what it holds for the historian trying to reconstruct the history of a community – in this case the Tamil Jainas. One begins with the most basic questions, namely, who is Nīli? What does it mean / did it mean to be Nīli? And who all tried to interpret, narrate, 'pick' Nīli's story in Tamiḻakam? This is what the *Section 2* will engage with.

Section 2

Nīli, and Perceptions

"*Nīli kaṇṇīr nettiyilē*" [60] - implies shedding crocodile tears.
"*Nīlikku kaṇṇīr nimayilē*" [61]- again, signifies crocodile tears; as also something foreboding far-reaching consequences.
"*Nīlitanam*"; "*ivaḷ Paḻayaṉūr Niliyammā!*"[62] – both signify a cruel woman, or one causing pain to others.

"*vayyakattil palavuruvam pūntu naṅkai*
vayiruṇṭu vāyuṇṭu pēcamāṭṭāḷ
kāciniyil vekuperai keṭutta nīli
niyamiṉṟi varitanil vicayaṅ ceytu
akilam ellāṅ tericanaṅ ceytanantippāḷ
mey vēntar vīṇarukkum viruntuk kēṟpāḷ
metiniyi livaḷāreṉ ṟiyapuvirē"[63]

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[59] Interpretive translation.
[60] My mother (Ramani) actually directed my attention to this phrase, in the course of our engagement with Nilakeci. The phrase, my mother said, was something she heard often, popular in the region around Karur, Tiruchi, Udumalpet. And perhaps elsewhere too.
[61] Shanmugasundaram, PN, p.39
[62] Ibid, p.37
[63] Ibid, p.39

This Tamil riddle above is translated thus - 'Tell me what on earth is this (creature) that has a stomach, no feet, is small, with matted locks, with a mouth that cannot speak and has no hands; it is (like) Nīli who destroyed (the lives of) many on this earth; that calls for a feast for no reason...?' The answer to this is a kind of fish.

At the same time, there are these alternative perceptions. In one of the Tamil dictionaries[64], Nīli is shown as equivalent of Durgā, Pārvati. Winslow's dictionary cites these meanings for Nīli – "Kāḷi, the goddess; Durgā, Pārvati; a cruel, vindictive woman..." At the same time he also refers to "nīlittanañceyya" – as "to act impudently – said of women"; and "nīliāṭṭamāṭā" – as "to recite the drama of Nīli, to behave without shame". [65]

In the Cilappatikāram, Nīli is equated with goddess Koṟṟavai by the author Iḷaṅko (in chapter 12, 'vettuva vari: v. 67 to 90). "*...kumāri kavuri cāmari cūḷi nīli malavaṟku iḷankiḷai...*" [66] These are various names of goddess Koṟṟavai. Nīli is one of these.

"In the Kaṇṇaki legend...the tutelary deity of Madurai tells Kaṇṇaki that in her previous birth she was Nili, wife of the merchant Caṅgkaman of Siṅgapuram..."[67]

A popular song dedicated to goddess Māriammaṉ goes thus: "*āyiram kaṇṇuṭaiya aḻakil ciṟantakaṇṇu*

[64] The LIFCO Tamil-Tamil-English dictionary, Chennai, 1996, p. 416 below.
[65] Rev. M. Winslow, A Comprehensive Tamil and English Dictionary of High and Low Tamil, Asian Educational Services reprint, 2004 (originally published in 1862, by P.R. Hunt, American Mission Press, Madras), p. 685
[66] J.Srichandran, ed, Cilappatikāram, Vardhamana Patippakam, Chennai, 2000. Pp.220-21.
[67] K.P.S. Hameed, Two Traditional Narratives in Tamil, in R. E. Asher, ed, Proceeds of the Second International Conference Seminar of Tamil Studies,

patināyiram kaṇṇuṭaiya
pātakatti nīliyava"[68]

'She (Māriyammaṉ) is the beautiful one among thousands; one with ten thousand eyes; a Nīli who inflicts pain.'[69]
Māriyammaṉ is also called Nīli in keeping with her ability to wreak vengeance, when displeased, hence the need to keep her happy and pacified. She is another of the Tamil folk deities with a potent anger and stories abound of her turning into a vengeful foe if things go amiss in propitiating her, or if vows made are not fulfilled, or forgotten.

The Viḷḷuppāṭṭu version of Paḻayaṉūr Nīli story ends with the construction of a temple/ shrine for her and propitiating her as a goddess. Her 'pēy' form, at times, then, could in fact merge with that of a goddess.

In Tamil textual tradition Nīli's story found place in different periods. The Tevāram hymns too mention the 'pēy Nīli' or make reference to the 'one of Paḻayaṉūr' whose story evokes terror in people's minds. In one of his patikams Gñānasampantar says of her: - "*muṉai naṭpāy vañcap paṭutorutti vāṇāl koḷḷum vakai kēṭṭu añcum paḻayaṉūr*"[70]
'Paḻayaṉūr is terrified of her, whose love transformed into cruel vengeance and killing spree.'

The story of Nīli also appears in Cēkkiḻār's Periya Purāṇam. [71] The story is of the brāhmiṇ, his wife and his affair with the courtesan. This is the same story as we saw in Nīli Nāṭakam

Vol 2, International Association of Tamil Research, Chennai, 1968 (pp.196-204); p.203, fn.6
[68] Shanmugasundaram, op.cit, p.40
[69] Not literal translation.
[70] Po.ve.So, op.cit, p.24; translation mine.
[71] A reference to this is made by A. Chakravarti (Nīlakeci, English, with editorial comments), Po. Ve. So and others.

(perhaps Nīli Nāṭakam takes from this story told in Cēkkiḻār's work). The wife goes away to her parents' place. He brings her back, and on the way, kills her and pushes her into a well (with her child). In the second birth he is born as a veḷḷāḷa merchant. His father gives him a sword to protect him from harm (as foretold by a soothsayer). As in the other versions, Nīli accosts him on his way to Paḻayaṉūr. Then follows the sequence of her plea to the veḷḷāḷas of Paḻayaṉūr; her seeking revenge by killing the merchant (her husband in the previous birth) after cleverly taking away the protective sword from him and the death of the veḷḷāḷas by jumping into a flaming pyre.

"*innum pukaḻ niṟka vūr paḻikkāmaḷ eḻupatiṉmar*
tunnuñ taḻalpuk kolintatellāñ karutip poruḷā
yunnum puricaittiruvālaṅkātināna mannum tamiḻil vakuttu teṉṟōr toṇṭaimaṇṭalamē
vañca ppaṭutorutti vānāl koḷḷum vakaikkēṭṭ
añcum paḻayaṉūr ālaṅkāṭṭem maṭikaḷē"[72]

'To this day the people of Paḻayaṉūr dread to think of the story of the 70 who took their own lives to keep the (honour of their) word and of the woman whose murderous vengeance (shook) Toṇṭaimaṇṭalam (toṇṭaimaṇṭalamē vañcappaṭutta orutti).'[73]

According to A. Chakravarti, "the object of this story evidently is to praise the nobility and honour of the vellalas who forfeited their lives in order to keep the honour of their word. It is quite evident that this Nīli, though an evil spirit, has nothing to do with the Kāli-Neelakesi"[74] He also says, "the title of the work Neelakesi according to the author is borrowed from the Kāli – Neelakesi of Pazhayanur...It not doubt refers to the Pazhayanur

[72] Shanmugasundaram, op.cit, p. 28 (quoting from patikam 45-1) of Cēkkiḻār's Periya Purāṇam
[73] Lose translation

adjacent to Tiruvālankāḍu of Tevāram fame (that all) Tevāram singers have referred to...- a village in North Arcot district. This Pazhayanur...had a famous Kāli temple (which) is evident from the book called Tiruvālangāḍu Sthalamahātmyam..." [75] According to this mahātmyam (in the sthalapurāṇa tradition) the gods, in order to crush the arrogance (and control) of Kāli of this place appealed to Viṣṇu who directed them to Śiva in turn. Śiva invited Kāli to a dancing challenge with him. And in his tāṇḍava dance, defeated her. "The author of this sthalamahātmyam, in his introduction, calls this Kāli as Neeli..." [76]

The Nīli story can also be found in Tiruttōṇṭarpurāṇam, Ālaṅkāṭṭu-ttalapurāṇam, Mūvartevāram, Rattinakaṇṭakam, Tiruppugaḻ, and so forth. Kamil Zvelebil, in his analysis of the Dravidian elements in Tamil Hinduism (as he calls it) speaks of the concept of 'ūrammā', the village deity / goddess / mother. "Ūrammā was most probably the Neolithic prototype of the ubiquitous goddess, of Devi, in her many various multi forms: above all of korravai, the ferocious female deity of war; of all the great local goddesses –Mīnākṣi...of Madurai, Nīli, the goddess of Ālaṅkāṭu, Kāmākṣi, goddess of Kāñcipuram..." [77]

Texts such as Tiruttōṇṭarpurāṇa varalāru (authored by Umāpati Śivācāriya), Cēkkiḻār's Piḷḷaitamiḻ, Periyapurāṇam (mostly Śaivite texts) interestingly highlight the veḷḷāḷas jumping into the fire (part of the) story. [78] In this sense, one would tend to agree with Prof. Chakaravarti that the central concern – with

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[74] A. Chakravarti, Neelakesi, p. 14-15.
[75] Ibid, pp11-12
[76] Ibid, p. 12-13
[77] Kamil V. Zvelebil, Tirumurugan, IITS, Chennai, 1981; p. 6
[78] One notes that possibly the veḷḷāḷa suicide motif is part of another folklore and tradition which has at some point blended into or merged into the Nīli story – which is by itself a simple tale of wrong-doing and revenge. At the same time, the death of Nīlaṉ (Nīli's brother) being avenged does not somehow fit into the 'basic' structure of the Nīli story.

Cēkkiḻār, for instance – was to praise the 70 veḷḷāḷas who 'kept their word'.

In Tiruttōṇṭarpurāṇa varalāru – with reference to Cēkkiḻār's Nīli story - the author writes, "*marukoṭu paḻayaṉūr Nīli ceyta vañcanaiyāl vaṇikaṉ uyir iḻappa tankal kūriya coḷ piḻayaṭu tunintu centikkuliyil eḻuvatupērum muḻki kañkai arani cencatai tiruvālañkāṭappar aṉṭamuṟa nimirntāṭum aṭiyin kīḻ meypēṟṟuperum vēḷāḷar perumai emmāl pirittu aḷaviṭṭu ivalaveṉap pecalāmo?*"[79]

'How can one describe in mere words the greatness of the 70 veḷḷāḷas who jumped into a pit of fire / flames for keeping their word, on account of the death of the merchant (vaṇikaṉ) at the hands of the vengeful Paḻayaṉūr Nīli?[80]

In Periyapurāṇam too, the greatness of the veḷḷāḷas, rather than the story of Nīli, is the highlight.

"*naṟṟirampuri paḻayaṉūrc ciruttōṇṭar navai van(tu) uṟṟapotu tamuyiraiyum vaṇikanuk korukāl coṟṟa meymaiyuñ tukkiac colayē kākkap peṟṟa meṉmaiyil nikaḻntatu peruñ toṇṭaināṭu*"[81]

'Toṇṭaināṭu shines with the (deed) magnanimity of the veḷḷāḷas of Paḻayaṉūr who kept their word (of honour) to the merchant, not caring for their own lives.'

Nīli is also mentioned in Kamba Rāmāyaṇam in Tamil – "*nīli tanatu kkenci ninṟa vaṇukeccarkkākka kōli yapayañ koṭukkañkai!*"[82]

'Nīli granted 'abhaya', assuring the merchant who stood before her, pleading.'

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[79] Shanmugasundaram, op.cit, p. 28
[80] Inferred translation
[81] Shanmugasundaram, op.cit, p. 29; translation mine – not literal
[82] Ibid, p. 28

In Abhidhānacintāmaṇi, Nīli is a brāhmiṇ woman, Navajñāni who was murdered along with her son. She is reborn into a merchant family in Paḻayaṉūr, and avenges her death murdering Darisana Ceṭṭi (her husband of the previous birth) and also leads the veḷḷāḷas to their (honour) suicide.

In Cēkkiḻār's Piḷḷaitamiḻ, we have a different version of the Nīli story wherein the man (brāhmiṇ, as in other versions) goes after the 'other' woman and his wife objects to the same. On the pretext of taking his wife to another village this man abandons her in the forest. The wife avenges this in the next birth as a pēy, Nīli. Again, the self immolation of 70 veḷḷāḷas is mentioned in this version.

Apparently Nīli's story spreads as far as the northern part of Kerala, where Pañcavankāṭṭu Nīlippāṭṭu (in the traditional genre of Tekkanpāṭṭu) narrates the story of Nīli; it is called Nīlikata.

Section 3

Nīlakeci: the Text

The author of Nīlakeci as has been mentioned before is not known and we only know of the commentator, Samayadivākara Vāmanamuṇi, who has been identified as the Vāmanācārya who authored the Jaina text Merumantarapurāṇam. Vāmanācārya is also referred to Mallisenācārya and is among the most revered of Jaina ācāryas of Tamiḻakam. While on this aspect of the authorship there is a consensus among scholars of Jaina literature, there is however, no informed consensus on the date of Nīlakeci.

Scholars assign anywhere from 1st century AD to 10th century AD for the text, but give no ample historical evidence for the

same. In many ways, one of the reasons for this is the fact that mostly the text Nīlakeci has been a subject of scholars working on it purely from a literary perspective. Nīlakeci has been more or less studied only in terms of its contribution to Tamil literature – among the various major and minor kāvyas. There has been no attempt (or hardly any attempt, so far as one has noted) to study Nīlakeci from a historical angle, in terms of placing it in the context of the history of the Tamil Jainas. Perhaps this has a role to play in giving different dates to this text – since the matter contained therein, and not the date of the matter, as it were, became the prime concern among scholars who have dated the text differently. Sometimes, the dating has been done on the basis of literary usage and terms appearing therein. In many cases, the only point where consensus has been arrived at is that Nīlakeci must date later than the Buddhist Kuṇṭalakeci, since it is modelled after this Buddhist text.

Po.Ve.Somasundaram[83] is of the opinion that Nīlakeci should have been written in the 5th century AD. He reasons that some of the names of Buddhist monks / teachers mentioned in the 6th century AD works of Mahendravarmaṉ, the Pallava ruler, seem to correspond to the ones mentioned in Nīlakeci, in her debate with the Buddhist thought in the text. So, he avers, Nīlakeci may have been written in a time prior to the works of Mahendravarmaṉ, somewhere around 5th century AD.

A. Chakravarti assigns Nīlakeci between 1st century AD and 5th century AD. "The commentator (of Nīlakeci) says that 'kuṟaḷ' is his scripture...., quotes Toḷkāppiyar and Nālaṭiyār....Hence it follows that he must be acquainted with these works and he must be of a later period....If the Jaina tradition about Kuṟaḷ is recognised to be valid, then we have to accept its age to be the

[83] Po.Ve.So, op.cit, p.21

1st century AD...Eḷāchārya (Kundakundācārya)...lived partly in the 1st century BC and partly in 1st century AD..."[84] Hence the upper limit of the date, he takes as 1st century AD. Again, "The author of Nīlakeci locates the Ājivika teacher and his conjugation in a suburban village called Samadaṇḍam – somewhere near Kukuṭanagar which is another name for Worayur, a town in Trichinopoly....King Harsha ...(in the) forest āśrama of Divākaramitra...meets several congregations...(of) religious orders such as Bauddhas, Jainas...In this group he finds the Maskarins. Maskari was the founder of the Ājivika school....Maskarin school or Ājivika sect was a living faith about the time of Sri Harsha in the early part of the 7th century AD.(Thus) in the south the Ājivikas were flourishing only in the early centuries of the Christian era and disappeared afterwards. This will put the lower limit for the composition of Neelakesi somewhere about the 5th century AD."[85]

Another important question he raises (in connection with assigning these dates) is "evidently the author (of Nīlakeci) was not acquainted with the later Vedānta schools of Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja and Mādhva. Only the earlier schools are mentioned and criticised in the work..."[86]

One is inclined to agree with the last point, especially considering the fact that the largest part of the text is the debate with Buddhism which was apparently a big force / thought system to contend with / reckon with at that point and the need for such a work, modelled after Kuṇṭalakēci, the Buddhist text. Verses 150 to 658, a total of 508 verses are dedicated to the debate with Buddhism. Of these the largest

[84] A.Chakravarti, op.cit, pp.5-6.
[85] Ibid, pp.7-8
[86] Ibid, p.6

section is Nīlakeci's debate with the Buddha himself, in verses 463 to 658, that is, 195 verses in all. Moreover, one would be inclined to wonder as to how, in terms of conflict with the Śaivite tradition - so crucial to the Tamil Jaina history – the Śaivite tradition, and Śaṅkara, would not even find mention in the text Nīlakeci, which has Nīlakeci challenging all the major religious / philosophical systems of the time. Also, by the 8th and 9th centuries AD, there was no immediate context to take issue with the Buddhists, since by that period they were well on their way to neglect and marginalisation in terms of political and economic patronage in Tamilnadu. Thus, devoting a large section to Buddhism – in a text dedicated to 'revealing' as it were, the lacuna in each of the major systems at that point, and highlighting the superiority of the Jina doctrine – would have been more of an anachronism.

10th century AD thus, seems an unlikely period to assign to Nīlakeci. One would agree with A. Chakravarti's larger arguments in this context, and not enter the dating debate further; while be inclined towards 5th century AD as a 'safe enough' period for its composition.

As for the author of Nīlakeci, importantly, A. Chakravarti says (based on internal evidence from the text) that the "author of Neelakesi was a direct student of the author of Kuṟaḷ from whom he learnt the several philosophical systems included in this work. I would also follow that the author of Neelakesi was a convert to Jainism and that he learnt the fundamentals of Jaina philosophy from his guru – the Thevar – the author of Kuṟaḷ. This influence we are constrained to have from...the 3rd stanza of Neelakesi where the author confesses that his story is not based upon accepted religious agamas of old."[87]

[87] Ibid, p. 10.

The stanza referred to above reads:

"*paṉṭākamattut payilāvuṟai yeṉṟu mikkar vīntin kitanai ve kulār viṭal veṇṭu vanyāṉ...*"[88]

'One day, as I was worshipping the arhat (jina) who walked on a lotus, I saw the events that unfolded here in this text in a dream. Hence, I admit (or urge) to the discerning and knowledgeable ones that this text does not claim to be based on our old āgamas (paṉṭākamattut....)[89]

Irrespective of the fact that the author dismisses, in a sense, all that is said of the events – leading to – the conception of Nīlakeci, the text, it may still be considered a fact that the author was well aware of, as also a part, of a socio-cultural context which related to, or was aware of Nīli (as) the pēy, her story. The Nīli story was deep rooted in the context the author came from, and which is what made him (re)consider a character such as this for a treatise on the Jina ideals. One agrees with Prof. A. Chakravarti that the author was a convert to Jainism (and came from a milieu where Nīli 'loomed large'); was influenced by the Jaina doctrine of karma and the 'ratna-trayam' (three gems – right faith, knowledge, conduct). The author had an immediate 'base', and it had to be one that convinced readers of the idea of 'becoming'. It had to be a character from the author's own immediate environs, which could convince people that if a 'pēy', a dreaded possession spirit / woman such as Nīli, could become a philosopher and preacher of Jainism, surely, anyone could accept the Jaina doctrine and transform into better human beings. At another level, the author admitting that this text did not follow any of the old agamas (almost as a confession of going 'out of track') is because the author has to show – as a new entrant into Jainism

[88] Po.Ve. So, op.cit, "Avaiyaṭakam": v.3; p.15
[89] Translation mine

– double the respect for the old āgamas of Jainism, especially since the author is going out of the way to bring in a possession spirit as a central character in the text. Thus, the author chooses to call the sequence of the text, as part of a dream. Moreover, a folk tale of the region gives Nīlakeci, the text, a certain rootedness in the region, to be able to debate with the systems of thought then prevalent in the area.

Interestingly, and intriguingly too, however, the locale, the 'site' of the story, the setting of Nīlakeci happens to be in the 'north' (in Pāñcāladesa) and the places where she debates each system of thought are not all of them in the Tamil country. But strangely enough, in the period that Nīlakeci is believed to have been composed these are the systems of thought popular in Tamiḻakam. It may not be a totally unrelated matter that Nīlakeci also happens to be a text of the Tamil Jainas and does not find a special place in the pan-Jaina (or pan-Indian Jaina) textual tradition. Of course, it is also written in Tamil, and obviously, had a certain audience in mind. Funnily enough, though, the place, as the events unfold, is Pancaladesa, the goddess of Palālayam temple (i.e. Kāḷi) has to look far and wide and ultimately chose "*teṉṟicai Nīlakeci*" – Nīlakeci of the south – to help her out in scaring away the Jaina monk Muṇicantraṉ. This is obviously on the one hand to give sanctity and importance to the character of Nīli the pēy (dreaded across Toṇṭaimaṇṭalam for her cruelty) as also to give that much more potency to the doctrine of karma and becoming, that such a character as Nīli could become an adherent and proponent of Jainism. The three gems of Jaina faith, and the doctrine of *koḷḷāmai* (non-killing / ahimsa), retrieve Nīli from a life of violent retribution.

As noted earlier, Nīlakeci devotes the largest part of her mental engagement with Buddhism. The debate with Buddhist

philosophy sees Nīlakeci take up issue with Buddhism, with instances from the dhamma as preached by the Buddha, the eight-fold path, the doctrine of nirvāṇa, an elucidation of the Jātaka stories and so forth. She does not merely debate with Kuṇṭalakeci, but also with the Enlightened one himself, to prove the moral and philosophical superiority of the Jaina doctrine, especially that of the Jaina idea of ahiṁsā – in thought and praxis.

The sites of Nīlakeci's debates, and her movement in that process, are interesting. It starts of course with Pāñcāladesa the beauty of which place is described in truly lyrical poetic style. Very importantly, it uses the conventions of Tamil Cañkam poetry in using the five *tiṇai* (*aintiṇai* – five ecotypes) concept to describe the country ruled by one Samudrasāran. It may be noted here that usage of *aintiṇai* conventions also decides in favour of assigning Nīlakeci to a period up to 5th century AD, as even in terms of usage, the tiṇai concept became relatively redundant for later period Tamil poets/authors. Bhakti, and related developments too gave literature a different flavour than those written in earlier periods in the history of Tamiḻakam. Although further work needs to be done on analysing the reason for these changes – in terms of literary conventions - perhaps a certain tendency of universalisation set in place by the onset of a brāhmiṇism-temple –land tenure–bhakti (socio-economic-cultural) 'complex', which had its effect and influence over such changes. For aintiṇai concept itself, as scholars have shown, may not be seen merely as a literary convention of early Tamil poets but a reflection of, or extension of the socio-cultural and political situation then prevalent. Zvelebil points out that the tinai concept (he only talks of four, not five tiṇais, leaving out what's been seen as rather ambivalent / abstract construct, the '*pālai*' tiṇai) "was elaborated, formalised and conventionalised by Tamil sages of

the early classical age, but it was most probably founded on the actual state of affairs when some centuries earlier, the ideal eco types were still rather separate as different concrete types of habitat of various tribal and demi tribal communities." [90] According to Murton, the tinai concept signifies actual landscapes of the Tamil country (which) became the 'interior landscapes of Tamil poetry."[91]

Coming back to Nīlakeci, the early part of the text is substantially devoted to describing Pāñcāladesa and these verses use the kind of imagery and 'sense' of the geography one sees in the *akam* poetry of Caṅkam Tamil. For instance: -

"*māñcōḷai poṅki marutankuḷip piḷḷai kalvāyt*
tīñca ruḻukuñ tiṉaiyiṉṉaṉī tankī yeṅkuñ
tāñcōḷa vāḻna taḷirīṇuṉ takaiya kuṇṭu
pāñcāla meṉṟu palarumpukaḻ pārtti nāṭē."[92]

'The country called Pāñcāla, celebrated for its fame and prosperity, is one which exemplifies the beauty of all the tinais. Of these, the *marutam* (riverine) tinai excels with its profuse mangroves with parakeets perched atop trees, feasting on the juices of sweet mangoes...'[93]

Again, there is a description of the *kuṟiñci* part of this land:

"*niṉaiciṉaiyaṉa rakuvīraiyaṉa nalaṉṉātai yaṉa nākam*
viṉaiyutaiyaṉa poḻukivaiyeṉa virivaṉakaṇivēñ
kaṉaicuṭarvīṭu katirmaṇiyaṟai kaḷanayarvaṉa kānt [kar]
liṉiyaṉapala cuṉaiyayavaṉa vīṟuvaraiyaṉa kuṟiñci"[94]

'Here in this kuṟiñci flourish trees such as the jambulina; and numerous fragrant flowering plants abound, the kino tree; here

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[90] Kamil Zvelebil (1981), cf. cit, p.7

[91] Brian J.Murton, "Geography and the study of south India", in Burton Stein, ed, Essays on South India, Honolulu, 1975, pp.93-4. Scholars such as Stein, Sivathamby, Rajan Gurukkal, R. Champakalakshmi, Selvanayagam and many others have made excellent hypotheses based on the tinai concept, which is not in the immediate purview of this dissertation.

[92] Po.Ve.So, Tarumavuṟaiccarukkam-Nāṭṭucciṟappu, v.10, p.21

[93] Translation mine

the kuṟavar spend time picking millets. The mountain glistens with the sun's rays (and moonlight) and there you see space laid out (kalam) for the shaman's veṟi-āṭal (dance). Kuṟiñci is one (where) kuṟiñci (flowers) blossom by the pools of water (or springs) by the mountainside.'[95] The making of the kalam (space / context) for veṟi-āṭal is a very typically kuṟiñci motif of the akam poetry. A beautiful context of laying out space for veṟi-āṭal in some of the akam poems have the heroine's family, fearing she is unwell, while she is love-sick, lay out the kalam and make the shaman dance to rid her of the bad spirit. At this juncture one would like to mention Vijayalakshmy's point on the interaction between Sanskrit and Tamil Jaina epics. She makes this point taking the instance of Cīvakacintāmaṇi, one of the major kāvyas, especially on the descriptive elements present there. She says, "Though such descriptions arise out of the mahākāvya tradition in Sanskrit, the way in which the fauna and flora are described is in accordance with the Tamil conventions."[96] However, there is no explanation of the reason for looking at Nīlakeci and the influence of Sanskrit kāvya on the same. Moreover, Vijalayalakshmy dates Cīvakacintāmaṇi around 8[th] century AD, and mentions Nīlakeci as a text that was composed post Cīvakacintāmaṇi (and influenced by Sanskrit literature and poetics) in Tamil. But if one were to look at evidence stated by Prof. Chakravarti on the dates of Nīlakeci (based on its issue with the systems of the time, as one has noted earlier) it would be difficult to concur with Vijayalakshmy's explanation in so far as Nīlakeci is concerned. However, the fact that she avers that the descriptive elements (flora and fauna) fit the 'Tamil' conventions may substantiate one's point about the use of the tiṇai concept in Nīlakeci (with related concepts) coming form a poetic tradition immediately

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[94] Po.Ve.So, Tarumavuṟaiccarukkam:kuṟiñci nila varuṇai)v.16, p.25
[95] Translation, mine, based on the Tamil editorial notes by Po.Ve.So.

preceding, or corresponding with, it. In the entire text, wherever Nīlakeci announces her challenge, there is a description of the place, and the use of the tinai to describe the same. However, having said this, it must be clarified that one's own idea is not to give a detailed descriptive account or a literary analysis of Nīlakeci the text, per se; but more the condition and the context of its origin, and significance of the same. One's focus is more on the way the text focusses on the re-interpretation of a local idiom – or use of a prevalent cultural metaphor - to suit a purpose very different from the one the idiom / metaphor is confined to. One is looking at how a 'counter-tradition' (perhaps) is created, both literally and metaphorically. And that too, is adapted from yet another counter (to the larger Vedic) tradition, that of Kuṇṭalakeci of the Buddhists. It is also important for one to reiterate the fact that the cultural idiom (of Nīli) has in it something so significant that it has given itself to so many versions and re-interpretations in its long wandering existence. And in all these interpretations (or despite them) certain motifs remain forceful and powerfully intact, and do not change, such as Nīli as a pēy, or the pēy form of Nīli, as one will discuss at a later point in this chapter. A point where, even for a brief moment, even in Nīlakeci that starts off with an all new meaning for Nīli, redeeming her, as it were, from her 'pēy-ness', the pēy Nīli figures, albeit for a brief moment in the text.

Nīlakeci in Her Debating Journey

The 'site' of Nīlakeci text, of course, is Pāñcāla, as has been said before, a country in the 'north' (*vaṭaku*) It begins with the author's prologue, that the events occurring in the text are all based on his dream. In this Pāñcala country then, at a cremation ground with a temple of Kāḷi, begins the story of Nīli's (of the

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[96] R. Vijayalakshmy, A Study of Cīvakacintāmaṇi..., L. D. Institute of Indology, Ahmedabad, 1981, p.114

'south' [97]) encounter with, and finally submission to Muṇicantran, and Jaina ideals. Once enlightened, Nīlakeci, as is usual with any new convert, takes up her 'vocation' with great fervour and her first debate would obviously be with the 'next' most important / influential / prominent systems, namely, 'Buddhavāda', Buddhism. It begins with Nīlakeci challenging Kuṇṭalakeci. This may be both to challenge the text Kuṇṭalakeci, with Nīlakeci being written as a counter to it, and modelled after it at the same time; as well as a challenge to the character Kuṇṭalakeci, the Buddhist nun.

The sites of Nīlakeci's debates and are, respectively, as follows – Kāmpili, capital of south Pāñcāla (Kuṇṭalakeci, "Kuṇṭalakeci vātaccarukkam"); Ujjain (Arukaccantiravātaccarukkam); Padmapura (Mokkalavātaccarukkam); Kapilapura (Buddhavātaccarukkam); Kukkuṭanakara (Ācivikavātaccarukkam); Hastināpura (Cāñkiyavātaccarukkam / Sāñkhya); again, Hastināpura (Vaiceṭikavātaccarukkam / Vaiśeṣika); Kākaṇṭi (Vetavātaccarukkam); and finally, on the way, perhaps the same place, for the text does not mention the same of the place for this section – except that it is in the royal court of Madanajit. The people she debates with in each of these places are, respectively, Kuṇṭalakeci, Arukaccantira, Mokkala and the Buddha himself – she starts with the teachers of Buddhism to the Enlightened one himself; Maskari, Parāsara, Lokahit, Pūtika (Bhūtika) and finally, Piśācaka. Only one among these happens to the founder of the school of thought – Gautama Buddha – while others are great teachers of their respective schools. The author seems to have done this with a purpose, namely, to establish the superiority of Jaina perception of

[97] It is interesting to see that both figuratively and literally there is 'movement' here from a local to a larger Jaina sacred (?) geography and

ahimsa as against the Buddhist, and in what better way could this be affirmed than to have Nīlakeci debate with the Buddha himself. It is meant to give the text as much as the character (or the author of Nīlakeci) and the text a certain celebrated antiquity as much as to give sanctity to the Jaina-Buddhist debate (a very crucial debate in the history of both these systems) on ahiṁsā. For, obviously, Nīlakeci (the text) cannot claim to belong to the time of the Buddha. But in including a separate section within the larger Jaina-Buddhist debate – Nīlakeci (or the author, through the character) is only establishing the potency of Jina ahiṁsā over Buddhist (what the Jainas call 'pseudo') ahiṁsā. Surely, a debate with, and winning over, the founder of Buddhism gives Nīlakeci, and its author prestige and eminence, considering that Nīlakeci has recently been transformed from a pey to a Jaina teacher. And this is the first non –Jaina system she is debating with. Establishing her prowess in philosophical enquiry and debate with the Buddha, would give her the aura that will precede her wherever she goes, throwing open the challenge in each place of her visit.

One would briefly take up here a few salient points for discussion from Nīlakeci's arguments with the systems of thought important to one's own study – here, Buddhism, Vedic system and Bhūtavāda (materialistic system). [98]The idea is also to bring out some crucial points concerning the Jaina identity question and the identity of Nīlakeci and her 'past' as a pēy, both of which are subtly expressed in these arguments, and intrinsic to one's own discussion on 'recasting' of Nīli in the section that follows this one. Before moving on to the debate,

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movement for Nīli – as a pēy, from the south to meet the Jaina monk in the north, and inspire a text in her name!

[98] References for each of these debates are from Po.Ve. So's Nīlakeci (Tamil); A.Chakravarti's Nīlakeci (English reprint edn); and Saroja (reference will be mentioned in course of the discussion)

there is yet another aspect that is part of dedicating an entire text to debate with non Jaina systems. As Phyllis Granoff says, "Jain reactions to the fact that they lived in a world marked by religious plurality and one in which their own faith was not the dominant one must have been as many as and as varied as the local circumstances of their lives. But one consistent Jain response seems to have been that Jains exhibited an eagerness to study and understand the various religious groups around them was virtually unparalleled in classical and medieval India. Jaina monks read and studied every major work of literature, philosophy, poetics..."[99]

The last point, of course, is clear from even a casual perusal of Nīlakeci. In order to debate and refute each philosophical / religious system, it is important to have known and grasped the finer details of each of these systems. Granoff further asserts, "...We have many accounts in the biographical and story literature of Jain monks engaging their opponents, and of course, defeating them...Many Jain philosophical texts are also debates, ad give evidence of the fact that Jains did not withdraw into the seclusion of their own community but actually sought to engage with other groups or intellectual issues that concerned them."[100]

The Two Women Meet

After a humbling experience with Municantira and having learnt a word or two about the ratna-trayam of Jainism, Nīlakeci starts her journey. She first wishes to challenge Buddhist thought, the next (only) such system, besides the one she is converted to, that talks of ahiṁsā, yet is ambivalent on the question of eating meat. At Kāmpili, where she goes seeking

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[99] Phyllis Granoff, "Being in the Minority: Medieval Jain Reactions to Other Religious Groups", in N.N.Bhattacharya, ed, Jainism and Prakrit in Ancient and Medieval India, Manohar, Delhi, 1994 (pp.241-266); p. 242-3

[100] Ibid, p.242.

debate, Kuṇṭalakeci has planted her symbolic rose-apple tree challenging people to come debate her. This is the moment for Nīlakeci. Before we move on to some significant aspects of this debate it may do well to look at the 'antecedents' of Kuṇṭalakeci as well. And it may not have been incidental that the actual debate (for which this text was created) of Nīlakeci begins with Kuṇṭalakeci herself (while it could have also begun with the Buddha himself, who comes in later). One, it is Kuṇṭalakeci the text[101], that the author of Nīlakeci is refuting, or countering, essentially; and two, there are certain similarities in the way Kuṇṭalakeci, too, took to Buddhism, and in her life-story, which also had a violent aspect to it. Though her beginnings are very different from that of Nīli's. The difference, of course, is that Kuṇṭalakeci is considered (and seems to have been) a historical character, unlike Nīli, who is more of a 'construct' – at least her pēy form is. But 'transformation from and into' is the binding factor between the two women apart from the commonality in their chosen vocation, once transformed. Hence, one would need to digress here to narrate briefly the story of Kuṇṭalakeci, while a discussion on her story, its base in a common folk idiom, will follow in the forthcoming section. Her story is given in the 46th section of the Psalms of the Sisters (Thērigātha), edited by Rhys Davids, under the heading, "Badra Kuṇṭalakeci, the ex-Jain".[102]

Kuṇṭalakeci was born as Badra in the home of the treasurer of

[101] This Tamil Buddhist text – one of the five major kāvyas - as a whole text, is considered more or less lost to time. All we know about Kuṇṭalakeci is through references from other texts, such as even Nilākeci which devotes a large part to it. In 1996, J.Srichandran brought out some sections of Kuṇṭalakeci, based on these references and extracts from elsewhere, in a book titled, Maṇimekalai, Valaiyāpati, Kuṇṭalakeci:Mūlamum, Telivuraiyum (Vardhamana Patippakam, Chennai). One has taken some references of Kuṇṭalakeci's life, etc, from this book.

the king of Rājagriha. She fell in love with a thief (after casting a glance at him while he was being taken to the gallows) named Sattuka (Kālan̲, in some versions). She desires to be married to him and through emotional 'blackmail' she manages to convince her father to get him as her husband. The father bribes the guards to release him and gets them married. One day, a misunderstanding occurs between the two after she calls him a 'thief' casually. He pledges to avenge this insult. He tells her one day he had taken a vow to offer worship to a hill deity if he was released. And it is time now to fulfill this vow. He asks Badra to accompany him, bedecked with her best jewels. Unsuspectingly, she accompanies him. Once at the cliff, he commands her to remove all her jewellery and hand it over to him. Her arguments to make him act sensibly fail. He tells her he plans to kill her after taking all her jewellery. Her presence of mind saves her. She tells him she would willingly give her jewels and her life for him, but would like to circumambulate around him one last time as he was her husband and she his devoted wife. The conceit in him allows her to do so. After the second round, she embraces him, and pushes him from over the cliff and kills him. Having done this, she is bereft of all desires towards the material world. Badra joins the order of the nirgranthas, where in due course, she gets her name as Kuṇṭalakeci, one of curly locks. In time she becomes well versed in the doctrine and starts having debates with other systems, with a rose apple tree branch as her symbol of throwing open a challenge, wherever she went. It was in one of these sessions that she was defeated by the Buddhist teacher, Sāriputta, who asks her to seek refuge in the Buddha, who admits her as a nun. Thus she was apparently a Jaina nun who converted to Buddhism.

[102] A.Chakravarti, Nīlakeci, p.75; for her story, J.Srichandran, above

At Kāmpili when Nīlakeci entered, not a soul was in sight, for Kuṇṭalakeci had put up her rose apple tree branch and none was ready to accept her challenge. Nīlakeci duly went ahead, crushed the rose apple tree branch, and accepted the challenge to debate Kuṇṭalakeci. People, overjoyed, eagerly witnessed the debate that happened in the king's court.

"...*kāmpilik kāvalaṉ kaṭaimukattōr*
taṇṭaḻaiya poḻilnāvaṟ
cākaikanaṭ turai peṟuk
kuṇṭalakeci ppēyaraik
kūṟiyaka vēkoṇṭāḷ."[103]

'Finding the rose apple tree branch in front of the gate of the city of Kāmpili and learning from the gatekeeper the reason thereof, she crushed the same and sent word that she accepts the challenge of debate with Kuṇṭalakeci.'[104]

With Kuṇṭalakeci, Nīlakeci's main points of contestation include the rejection of the Buddhist theory of there being no atman and that of impermanence. She also takes issue with each of the Jātaka tales of the Bodhisattva, denying greatness and compassion to the Buddha, saying that causing pain to oneself without it being of use to another may not be called greatness. Kuṇṭalakeci narrates the magnanimity of the Buddha in many of his previous births. Thus, in Sibi Jātaka, Bodhisattva as king Sibi granting his own eyes; Sasa Jātaka, as a hare, offering himself to the brāhmaṇ; Maitribala Jātaka, as king who tore off his own flesh and offered food to the yakṣas and so forth.[105]

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cited, pp.512-531
[103] Po.Ve.So, op.cit, "Kuṇṭalakecivātaccarukkam", v.164, p.127
[104] Translation mine
[105] These are some of the Jātaka stories alluded to when Kuṇṭalakeci speaks of Buddha's munificence and compassion.

"kaṇkoṭuttāṉ ṟaṭikoṭuttāṉ
kayappulikkut taṟkoṭuttāṉ
peṇ koṭuttāṉ nuṭampiṉaiyum
piḷantiṭṭup piṟarkkīntāṉ.."[106]

'He (the Buddha) gave his eyes, his body parts, offered himself to the hungry tiger (and) his own wife he gave away; as he gave, in each of his lives (thus), he inflicted suffering upon himself (in each act of munificence)'[107]

Nīlakeci charges that these are more acts of foolishness than munificence and compassion. She points out, "magnanimous gifts must be of some service to the persons who receive the gifts. For a headless trunk to go to the Bodhisattva and ask his head is primarily meaningless....and it cannot live, much less speak; and to satisfy this headless trunk by severing his own head does not indicate the wisdom of the giver..."[108] Nīlakeci rejects each of the instances that Kuṇṭalakeci narrates, as meaningless. Kuṇṭalakeci speaks of the Buddha as having travelled through the samsara for several kalpas (times / time-zones) for the welfare of others. The three pītakas revealed by him are the Buddhist scriptures and Nīlakeci wonders if the Buddha is supreme and perfect from the beginning, then why should he wander through saṁsāra for several kalpas, unless it is due to his past karmas. The most crucial point she raises is about meat eating, which is not condemned in Buddhist teachings. "While preaching mercy to all living beings, it did not condemn flesh eating...while preaching ethical conduct or silacara, it rejects the doctrine of the atman. There is no meaning in insisting on moral life, while rejecting the very basis of morality."[109]

[106] Po.ve.so, op.cit, v.205; p.171
[107] My translation
[108] A.Chakravarti, op.cit, p.144

Through these and other arguments Nīlakeci defeats Kuṇṭalakeci and finds out the name of her teacher, Arukacantira, whom she debates next. One is not focussing on the points of debate with Arukacantira and with Mokkala. One will go directly to the debate wit the Buddha himself.

Nīlakeci and the Buddha at Kapilapura

There is no attempt to hide the contempt of the Jainas towards the Buddhists and their 'ways' and this comes out clearly in the way the poet describes the environment where Nīlakeci meets the Buddha. For instance,

"kaḻukiṉ ṉiṉamum kuḻutin ṉiṉamum
muḻutum maṟuvai palamu tiṉarum
koḻutin ṉiṉanum piṇṇum piṇanuñ kulavi
iḻuteṉ ṉelumpā riṭuka ṭiṉavum"[110]

'Nīlakeci looks in wonder (disgust) at the place with bhikkus with easy access to fattening things to eat, and looks at the bones strewn across, of deer, goats, and other animals displayed at meat stalls along the way'[111]

And as she walks along,

"cātiye mikka taṭumāṟṟa veṉtuyara
motiye vaittārav vottelā mīkkiṭanta
vītiye kānalā meṉṟula niṉṟurum
potiyā rīṇṭaip pulālpaḻiya reṉṟalum"[112]

'On the streets of that town she looks at vocations that cause suffering to living beings and remarks this must be what the Buddha preaches. And guesses that the Buddha must live somewhere close by, and looking at the stalls with enough fish

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[109] Ibid, p.143
[110] Po.Ve.So, op.cit, v.468; p.403
[111] Not literal translation – mine.

to eat....(wonders) and these must be to meet the demands of the Buddhist (order).'[113]

Where does she meet the Buddha?

"*anicey ko̲larai yarainil̲alal̲akanaip porunti*
maṇika tāmpala katirvītu malaruṭai maṇaimer̲
r̲aṉivu tor̲r̲iṉai yeṉaccilar tutiyoṭu tol̲utu
paṇiya yātumor parivilaṉ paṭamputtai tiruntāṉ."[114]

'She finds the beautiful Buddha seated under a banyan tree on a shining pedestal in his castle along with a few bhikkus, showering praises on him and worshipping, few with hands folded, in veneration. The Buddha, clothed in his monk's clothing, has been preaching them – "*...cuttiram-m-itu viṉaiyamum ituvitu pir̲itāñ cāttiram-m-ivai mūṉr̲aṉa vaṉravat-toṉr̲āl...*"[115] – about sutta pītaka, vinaya pītaka and abhidhāma pītaka....

At this point Nīlakeci requests him to elaborate on the doctrine so she can debate with him. With the Buddha, Nîlakeci has a long argument, mostly on the Buddhist understanding of atma and the skandas (the five skandas – rūpa, vēdana, vigñāna, sagña and saṁsāra skandas, and their momentariness. The Buddha tells her, "apart from the five skandas which constitute the puruṣa, we do not accept the existence of any independent reality called ātmā. These five skandas, which constitute the reality, are intrinsically characterised by – anitya, dukha, aśuchi, and anātmā...momentary and vanishing... One who realises the true nature of reality, will be free from evil, escape from saṁsāra and will obtain mokṣa, nirvāṇa."[116]

To which Nīlakeci says, "In order to clearly explain the

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[112] Po.Ve. So, v.469, p.404
[113] Not literal word-to-word translation. Mine
[114] Po.Ve.So., op.cit, v.476, p.410
[115] Ibid, v.477; p.411 (translation mine)
[116] A.Chakravarti, p.197-8

behaviour of the skandas, you have to postulate an underlying permanent substance as the sub stratum for these five skandas, and that is exactly what we call atma...Similarly, the elements vēdana skanda, vigñāna skanda, sagña skanda and saṁsāra skanda must presuppose a consciousness being capable of having these experiences..."[117] Further, "if knowledge leads to action, and if action, if action leads to feeling of pleasure or pain, you must admit an inter connection between the three and this connecting thing is just what we call ātmā."[118]

Nīlakeci also finds fault with the Buddhist definition of killing – conditions (five aṅgas) that constitute killing (must be a living being, must be known to be a living being to the person who kills there must be intention to kill, there must be the act of killing, and as a result of the act, the animal must die[119]) as she says then there should be no evil of killing in this world as all these five conditions cannot be satisfied. She then tackles the essential idea of momentariness (kṣaṇika) to highlight the superiority and feasibility of the Jaina idea of anēkāntavāda (many-ness). She points out that "no absolute point of view or Ēkāntavāda is logically possible. If you maintain the "savvam anityā" (all is impermanent) doctrine then even the person speaking must be anityā and there will be no time for him to preach his doctrine, no knowledge is possible for him, either to have or impart. Hence there can be no philosophy at all. So also when "sarvam nityā" is held. Then everything will be unchanging and permanent and ....no experience, no acquisition of knowledge, and no imparting of the same, for, all these imply activity and change...The only logical course....is to recognise the truth of anēkānta view, to accept that the reals have

[117] Ibid, p.198-9
[118] Ibid, p.201-02
[119] Ibid, p.p211-12

different characteristics from the different points of view..."[120]

"ninṟe nilaiyumeṉi ṉittiyame yāyoḻiyu
maṉṟeyi tāyi lanittiyamā mavviraṇṭu
meṉṟe yuraikki liruvaḻik kuṟṟamumā
meṉṟe yuraikkiṉṟa yekānta nākutiyo"[121]
"uccetan tāṉu moruvakaiyā lavvakaiye
yacceta miṉmaiyu mavvirantu māynikaḻntu
poycceta mallāp poruṇ mutipoṉ ṟṇtāka
meccāye nīyeṉayāṉ mecuvaṉe yeṉṟāṉ"[122]

Nīlakeci urges the Buddha to accept the anekānta view, outside of the extremes of anityā and nityā, and the existence of a permanent entity (ātmā)...The Buddha says, "yes, I acknowledge" – "*ān meccuvane yeṉṟāṉ*".

Nīlakeci and the Veda: Debate with Pūtika

While in each system analysed in the text portrays a readiness to debate and be challenged, with Nīlakeci the Vedavādaccarukkam shows the Vedic teacher Pūtika (Bhūtika) condemning Nīlakeci, whom he considers incapable and unqualified for condemning Nīlakeci, whom he considers incapable and unqualified to criticise the system as she is from the śūdra caste. This is the first (and only) instance in the entire text that the caste question comes up for discussion, showing also the kind of intrinsic association of caste and hierarchy with the Vedic system. The author, in bringing out this factor, has also registered a comment on the Vedic system. This occurs when, after hearing out Pūtika about the 'time-less' Veda and philosophical system emanating from the same - including

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[120] Ibid, p. 229.
[121] Po.Ve.So, op.cit, v.656; p.543
[122] Ibid, v.657; p.543-4

Sāṅkhya, Vaiśeśika, Brahmavāda, Pāśupata, sub sects within these and so on – Nīlakeci points out the that this mīmāṁsa system is a nāstika system, "not recognising the omniscient puruṣa..".

Pūtika says –

"nāttika mallatu collai
yāyiṉmu nāṉpayanta
cāttira māvatu vetamaṉ
ravatu tāṉcayampu
cūttiri nīyatu vallaiya
lāmaiyiṟ collukilāy
pottanti yovatan ṟimaiyaṉ
ṟuṉpoṅki p pūtikaṉē"[123]

'An enraged Pūtikaṉ shouts at Nīlakeci, saying, you śūdra woman (dare you) call our system nāstika. You born of a śūdra lineage have no right to criticise our vedas (which are 'svayambhū' / cuyampū – primordial). You are not qualified to point out faults in our system.' Then follows a lengthy argument, put forth by Nīlakeci on the caste question and the issue of 'high' and 'low' birth. She cites instances and examples form the scriptures to substantiate her point. She also forcefully negates the notion that the Vedas have no authors; and she asserts that names of these are mentioned in the Vedas. Nīlakeci points out, that great personalities, such as Vyāsa, Agastya, Sukha, Parāśara, etc, were all born to 'low' caste women. Parāśara's son, Vyāsa, was born of a fisherwoman, Vasiṣṭha's son Śakti, to a Caṇṭāla; and so forth.

There are two instances where Nīlakeci uses the analogy of human faeces and excreta to iterate her stand on the question of 'high' and 'low' birth.

"tōṟṟamu nāṟṟamuñ cuvaiyuṭa

[123] Po.Ve.So, v.826; p. 675; translation following, mine.

ṉaṟivar ṟuṟṟoṭanki
yāṟṟavu māyiru vetamval
lārkaḷ a taṟinturraippa
meṟkulat tāro ṭiḻintava
reṉpatu meymai peṟu
nūṟṟirañ ceytava raṟikuvar
miḻaintaṟi vuṭaiyavarē"[124]

'Just as the ones knowledgeable in āyurveda examine the faeces from its appearance (tōṟṟam), smell (nāṟṟam), colour and taste (cuvai) and not whether these are faeces of the high- or low-born, similarly, those who truly desire to examine the text (Vedas) do so by its content and not whether it has been composed by a high- or low-born (mēṟkulattāro tiḻintavarenpatu...)'

"yāratu ceytava raṟiyiliñ
kuraiyeṉi lañkaruva
ṉuratu naṭuvanoru ṟaiyuḷil
malampeyti ṭ tolittoḻiyir
pērinu muruvīṉum peṟaḷila
nātaliṉ ṟukkuṟittut
tēriṉu miṉiyatu ceytava
rilleṉac ceppuvavē"[125]

'A man shat in front of a house one night and vanished. Would it be possible to know whose faeces that might be? Or would you say they appeared there on their own (they were cuyampū)? Similarly, in the case of your vedas, just because you do not know the authors, does not mean they appeared on their own (that they have no author).'

It is intriguing as to why the author has chosen these analogies / examples to illustrate the fact that the Vedas indeed had

[124] Ibid, v.830; p. 683; translation (following verse) mine

authors and that caste was immaterial to knowledge or knowing. The use of scatological examples may also seem to be a subtle use of the satirical, and it should be noted that Nīlakeci pours forth all these (and more) examples, quoting from the Mahābhārata, especially in response to the caste question, which has her infuriated; and which seems to be the highlight of the Jaina debate with the Vedic teacher / thought; and only after a long argument establishing the futility of caste and social status, does Nīlakeci move on to the other important issue, namely, animal sacrifice in the Vedic ritual. The prioritisation of this debate is an important element which must be taken note of. [126]

Nīlakeci takes up the case of killing animals for sacrifice and shows the inherent contradictions in the Vedic system where, on the one hand, there is talk of killing of living beings as a bad deed, and on the other, there is perpetuation of the practice of sacrifice.

"kolvatu titeṉap poruḷvaḻī
vēlvīyiṟ kolapppaṭuva
vellaiyoṉ ṟilateṉpa vīṇaiviḻaic
celkati yulateṉpa tīrttika
neṟiyeṉṟun tīyaveṉṟu
pallavar tuṇivumem vētatti
ṉula veṉp payiṉṟuṟaippa" [127]

'Even though you say killing is bad, in order to amass wealth and material possessions you conduct sacrificial rituals. On the one hand you talk of controlling desire, but at the same time desire (gifts of) house and fame. You claim that many of the systems of the world are basically n the Vedas. Today your

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[125] Ibid, v.829; p.682; translation mine

[126] Unfortunately, the issue is more-or less brushed aside in books on Nīlakeci – few that are there.B.Saroja does not as much as mention a subject as important as this talking of the text. Chakravarti creditably records this. However, contextuality is missing.

Vedas are split into different systems (themselves).'

Nīlakeci refers to the four castes as a contradictory concept in the Vedas. She says –

"cātikkaṭ payavā tavapayan
tarumeṉat tanturaippa
vātikka ṇāṉ vaḻi nālvara
tamaitiyai yamanturaippa
cūtitta toṟṟamum piḻaippeṉac
cūttirap piṟavi koḷḷār
vātitta vāreṉṟu teruṇ tavark
kivaiyivai mayāmayakkē"[128]

"You arrange the creatures into four grades of importance according to their sources from the body of brahmā. Arranging people according to the four castes of lower and higher, would be meaningless when you remember that all of them are created from the very same body of Brahmā. But you cannot justify this classification on the ground that what proceeds from the head must be certainly higher than what proceeds from the feet; for a member of the body of Brahmā has neither greatness nor smallness in / by itself...."[129] All these statements are meant to delude (*"mayāmayakkē"*).

At the end of this, Pūtika, now defeated in debate, accepts the inconsistencies in the Vedic system and assures that changes will be put in place especially on the subject of ahiṁsā and non killing in rituals. Needless to say, the caste question is not mentioned.

Prof. A. Chakravarti has noted that 8 stanzas of the Vedavāda section are missing. He says he was unable to secure those

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[127] Po.Ve.So, op.cit, v.833; p.685; following translation mine
[128] Ibid, ve.834; p.686
[129] A.Chakravarti, op.cit, p 317

manuscripts [130]- which are probably lost to the world now.

Nīlakeci and Bhūtavāda

In the assembly of king Madanajit (here described as the one with shoulders as strong as the mountain, the peaceful and joyous looking one, etc [131]). Nīlakeci and the Bhūtavāda teacher, Piśācaka start their debate. Piśācaka enumerates the basic tenets of his school of thought (the materialist school, also known as the Lokāyata or the Cārvāka school). Before going to these tenets it must be mentioned here that one chose to focus on this particular debate with the contention that in this section the 'identity' of Nīlakeci, as 'pēy' is reverted to by the author, even if to prove a point to the Bhūtavādin Piśācaka. Her supernatural / para normal 'skills' are brought to play in this section. This, according to one, directs attention to the fact that at a basic level, despite the affirmative status (that one would elaborate upon later) Nīli's 'pēy' identity – in the Tamil cultural idiomatic sense – overwhelms, or at least pervades the larger 'universe' of this creative enterprise, namely, the philosophical text called Nīlakeci. Even momentarily the Nīli concept is relived; and it is important that she does so to make a Jaina point, as it were, about perceptions of reality and life. Only to make that point, she has to go beyond reality itself and what is 'perceived'. And in this, she seems to have validated or vindicated the text's creator in choosing, appropriately, a discourse on the superiority of the Jina doctrine over all others, through her own transformation. [132]

Coming back to the debate, Piśācaka tells Nīlakeci that Reality

[130] Prof. Chakravarti was the first to publish Nīlakeci, which had the Tamil verses and the English section both in one volume; though today there are hardly any copies of that original work of his which came out in the 1930s. Even his son, Mr. Jayavijyan in Chennai, did not have a copy of this book.
[131] Po.Ve.So, op.cit, v.855-6; p. 699-700
[132] At the same time the author also gives Nīlakeci her 'feminine' identity; a various points in the text, following literary conventions, Nīlakeci is described as one with fish-shaped eyes, or one with tresses like the clouds, and so forth.

in their doctrine comprises the five elements – air, water, earth, fire and ether. It is these five elements that lead to the sense perceptions of taste, colour, smell, touch and sound. Pleasure, pain, intelligence, perception, etc are aroused by a confirmation of these five elements and with the disintegration of these, everything else disappears. He derides any existence of a 'jīva' (uyir) apart from these five elements.

"ceṉṟa kālattuñ celkiṉṟa kālattu
niṉṟa kālatti lummin nikaḻcciye
yāṉṟu mivvula kittaṉmait tēyitu
vaṉṟa teṉṟuraip pārayarp pārkaḷē"[133]

'In all times (past, present, future) this is the reality (the five elements). These five elements and naught else prevailed. Ignorant are the ones that talk of another, beyond / above these.'

Nīlakeci gives a lengthy argument about the difficulty in accepting the fact that all is composed of five elements. What about those without an organ of a body? Is it that they cannot possess of the intelligence sic they do not have the corresponding sense perceptions that according to you, are connected to the five bhūtas? She also points out that there are experiences that cannot be explained going by the pañca-bhūta principle – such as dreams, hallucinations, etc. She proves the existence of a jīva and an intelligence beyond the pañcabhūtas, and also speaks of the Jaina – Tamil concept of living beings with one, two, three, or six senses. Ātmā and jñāna, thus, she says, are essential.

[133] Po.Ve.So, v.860 of Nīlakeci; p.702; translation following verse, mine

Nīlakeci points out to Piśācaka –

"pēyummilai piṟappatu millenpāy
vāyuñ kiḷḷip puṭaippa varuvateṉ
māyat tālaṉṟi mantirat tāṟṟeyvañ
cuyak kālaṟan koṭalai yoṭṭeṉa"[134]

'You say there is no after life of concept of spirits (pēy); (to which) he wonders, what is the use of her bringing up this subject (pēy). He says if you show, with the help of your powers, a pay right now, I will believe you. Nīlakeci says she will.' And then....

ōṭṭi ṉēṉeṉ ṟuraippa vuṇarvilā
muṭṭai kāṇkeṉa muṇkai muṟukkiyē
cuṭṭi ṉālankut toṟṟamu nōkkeṉa
viṭṭut tāṉṟan vikuvaṇai kāṭṭuvāḷ"[135]

Saying, so you shall see, with a snap of her fingers she changed herself into the form of a pēy....

And – *"kaḻutuñ kāṇala rākik kalañkiyē*
yaḻutuñ cāpavakalīṭat tārivaṉ
muḻutuñ kāṇiṉ muṭiyu meṉamuṉṉi
vaḻuvil vāyum valaipalluñ toṟṟalum"[136]

There, the leader of all pēys, Nīlakeci produces a form of a one with a face and mouth, and teeth, without the whole body, to show to Piśācaka.

Whereby,

"kaṇ putaittuk kaviḻuntaṉaṉ vīḻavē
tīṉ patattiṟ ṟeruṭṭi yeṭuttīrtip
paṇpu takkaṉa collipp pariyaṉiṉ
naṇpa teṉṟu neṭukkamuñ tīrttapiṉ"[137]

[134] Ibid, v.887; p.722
[135] Ibid, v.888 (p.723)
[136] Ibid, v.889; p.724

'Piśācaka, on seeing a form thus, with teeth and face, closed his eyes with his hands in fear, and fell unconscious. Nīlakeci held him up and comforting him, said, don't be afraid, that pēy was that of your beloved mother; and after he caught his breath, and got rid of his fear, said to him - *"pēykaṉ tāyatan peṟṟi yuṟaiyeṉa..."* [138] – "now that you have seen a pēy (of your mother) you may believe in its existence...."

For our purposes, Nīlakeci assuming, or reverting to the older form (pēy talaivi – chief of pēy s) to prove a point of the existence of forms beyond materialistic comprehension is important. Incidentally, it may be mentioned that Nīlakeci, throughout the text, goes to each site of debate aerially.
Her inherent power, thus, is not 'meddled with; by the author of the text. Thus ends not only Nīlakeci's debate with Piśācaka, but also her entire journey of philosophical discourse. This chapter of her debate with Piśācaka happens to be the last section of the text Nīlakeci.

Nīlakeci: the Text and Perspectives

The purpose of looking at Nīlakeci the text was two fold: one, to urge attention and focus of scholarship on the use of folklore in Tamil Jainism; and two, to read the text in a context, and look for meanings hitherto not seen, read, before.

One came across reference to the Nīli (pēy) story in an article many years ago, in a totally different context – of looking at myth and folklore in Tamilnadu. The folk story itself (now one can say, one version of it) was narrated by K.P.S. Hameed [139] in

[137] Ibid, v. 890; p. 724
[138] Ibid, v.891; p.725
[139] K.P.S.Hameed, "The Structural Pattern of Two Traditional Narratives in Tamil", in R.E. Asher, ed, Proceeds of the Second International

an article on two traditional Tamil narratives (looking at the idea of Vladimir Propp and the talk of 'structure' in folk narratives), but what was interesting (and intrīguing in being a mere small, off-hand mention) was an end-note reference to the Jaina work, Nīlakeci in the article. One's urge to learn more of that story, mentioned in the end-note, led one through the corridors of the Sahitya Akademi library in Delhi; as also to other references to Nīlakeci, the Jaina Tamil text, especially the one written by Prof. A. Chakravarti.

It is important here to note that firstly, not too many Tamil scholars have focussed on this text, perhaps also because of heavy interest (perhaps valid in its own way) in other Jaina Tamil works such as Cilappatikāram. Scholarship from outside India, too, has almost with singular attention focussed on the story of the Lay Anklet. The few scholars who have worked on Nīlakeci have been those based in Tamilnadu, and mostly those concerned with Tamil literature and Jaina philosophy.

There are, unfortunately, very, very few (if not none at all) people who have actually worked on Nīlakeci the text in a comprehensive manner. Part of the reason for this also lies in the fact that at one point the manuscript of Nīlakeci was scarce and it had taken the labour of the Tamil savant, such as U.Ve. Swaminatha Aiyer to retrieve it from a village and add to his huge list of collections for posterity. For a long while thereafter, despite the availability of the manuscript, there were few – even among the educated Tamil Jainas – to bring it out in published form. One of the manuscripts (in palm leaf / olaiccuvati) was also with the Melcittamur Jaina math in Cenji. Some works in Tamil such as Kuṇṭalakeci, Valayāpati, are believed to have to be as good as lost. Fortunately, Nīlakeci

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survived to see its printed version – though as has been mentioned before, some portions of the Vedavāda section in the text are lost.

Prof. A. Chakravarti, an ardent student of philosophy himself, was the Principal of the Government College at Kumbakonam. He got hold of the manuscript and decided to bring out a printed version of the same as early as 1936 – its first print edition. He not only brought out the text in the original Tamil but also included a scholarly translation and editorial notes in English. His 1936 work, too unfortunately, has very few copies left in libraries today. In 1994, the Prakrit Bharati Academy of Jaipur decided to bring out the second print edition of this work. But for some reason, they brought out only the English section of the text, and not the entire work in its original form as was published in 1936.[140]

In the Preface to his (original 1936 edition) Prof. Chakravarti writes – "Why I have undertaken to edit this, instead of leaving it to more important Tamil scholars, is due to two facts. One, scholars who have had the manuscript with them for several decades have not made up their minds to publish the work for some reason or the other; and secondly, the knowledge that there were only three or four manuscripts extant, naturally implied that if these few manuscripts were lost or destroyed the work itself would be lost to the world like the celebrated classics Kuṇṭalakeci and Valayāpati. Hence I have ventured to publish this work...It is hoped that this work will be of great use in Modern India as much as it emphasises the doctrine of non – violence in general and its corollary in special that the social organisation is to be based upon character and merit and

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Chennai, pp.196-204

[140] One had to search a lot, ask many of the Tamil Jainas one had met, to secure a copy of the original. Even his son, whom one met in Chennai, did not have the copy his father had published. One is still looking for a copy of the Tamil-English version of 1936.

not upon birth. Such an appeal to Modern India is of great importance to leaders of thought in their attempt to reorganise the Indian Society and rebuild the Indian nation."[141] Obviously, he was writing this before independence and hence a statement of this nature. It was a universal appeal to a "modern India".

Now it is this work that one has referred to, besides another, first published in 1964 (reprinted in 1973) by the South India Saiva Siddhanta Society, Tinnevelly as part of their series of publications of classics in Tamil literary tradition. It must be said, therefore, that the context in which these works appeared and the aim with which these were brought out were very different and one may not rightfully critique them with concerns that one is raising today, in this work and the way one is looking at it today – equipped as one is, in whatever limited manner, with critical historical and methodological concerns and ideas in a different world context – are bound to be far removed from the year and context when these early editions were published. However, one would just state a few points about these works and their focus and why was there a need to re-locate Nīlakeci as a text in a different context than has merited attention so far.

Prof. Chakravarti was looking essentially at a Jaina text par excellence – a text that highlighted some of the most influential, contemporary religious / philosophical / metaphysical systems of though. He was looking at the essence of this Jaina work and being a Tamil Jaina himself, and one of the educated and professionally qualified Tamil Jainas of a period in Indian history that was addressing 'modern' questions, he saw in this work, as he says in his Preface, something that needed to be shared towards an altruistic purpose. His interest in the whole

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[141] A.Chakrvarti, Nīlakeci, 1994 reprint edition. Preface, p.1

enterprise was more to bring out of the closet, as it were, a Tamil Jaina literary work. Hence, one can see the consciousness – of this larger aim - throughout his work. He also adds to the text, in his translation, by inserting critical comments one matters where necessary. For instance, in the chapter on Bhūtavāda and Nīlakeci debate, he adds a note that in some texts, the Bhūtavāda doctrine only spoke of four bhutas (elements) and not five, as stated in Nīlakeci. And to make this point he refers to other works which deal with Bhūtavāda, such as Sarvadarśana Saṅgraha of Mādhvācārya, Sarvasiddhānta Saṅgraha of Śankarācārya. "...The author of Nīlakeci introduces as the teacher of this Bhūtavāda one Piśācaka. Probably this is a fictitious name. But why should he introduce the five bhūtas instead of four? Is it really a problem to be investigated? Does it mean there was a special branch of this Cārvāka school which recognised the fiver bhūtas as the fundamental elements instead of four?...:"[142] He explains it thus – "at a period in the history of thought there must have been a belief that all the five elements combined to form the organic bodies. But later on, to make the system consistent with the logical foundations, Ākāśa must have been dropped out since it is not within the direct reach of sense perception."[143]

Comments such these are added as notes, not to be confused with the actual translated portion of Nīlakeci. But these additional notes set a particular context to the actual text. And most of these only reiterate his firm grasp over philosophical thought. At places one finds traces of a pre-independence era engagement / concern with European philosophy and classical metaphysical traditions of the West. As also a generation that was tackling issues of science and modernity and seeking these elements in Indian thought systems. Thus in the introductory

[142] A.Chakravarti, op.cit, p.336

pages, "He (author of Nīlakeci) has adopted the famous method of philosophical dialogue so splendidly used by Plato. Plato's dialogue has arisen to the literary eminence of a drama, because of the human elements introduced on the stage. The author of Nīlakeci similarly sustains the same dramatic element while trying to present the various philosophical systems and to critically examine them." [144] Again, "...Nīlakeci marshals elaborate arguments to establish the Jaina attitude towards the vegetable kingdom. This is referred to by the technical term Ekēndriya jīva – living beings having one sense...Enumeration of other characteristics which the plant world shares with the animal world, such as plants are subject to disease...that they behave quite like other living organisms with a characteristic re-action in response to adequate stimulus, that they are capable of curing themselves by internal re-adjustment and the quoting of the very instance of the plant Mimosa which figures so much in the recent researches of Dr. Bose illustrating the extreme sensitivity in plants...(are) ideas contained in a Tamil classic several centuries old." [145]

Elsewhere, Chakravarti compares and contrasts Jainism with Western thought. [146] In one of his essays he compares Jaina thought with Classical Greek thought. "Jaina thought agrees with the Greek atomists – Leucyppus and Democritus as to the constitution of the physical universe....Pythagoras...preached to his followers that they strictly abstain from meat-eating...Members of the Pythagoras order were also ridiculed for their vegetarian habit. It is quite probable that Pythagoras had contact with Indian religious leaders who preached ahiṁsā and vegetarianism...It is a historical fact that

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[143] Ibid, p.337
[144] Ibid, p.20-1
[145] Ibid, pp.21-22
[146] A. Chakravarti, The Religion of Ahiṁsā: the Essence of Jaina Philosophy and Ethics, Ratanchand Hirachand, Bombay, 1957

Jaina ascetics went to Persia, Mesopotamia, Asia (Minor) which was then called Monea..."[147]His interest did not stop at classical Greek thinkers. He indulges in comparative analysis with Descartes, Hume, Kant, Hegel and Karl Marx. "The metaphysical idealism formulated by Hegel is a distinct monoistic theory....But Jaina metaphysical system is distinctly pluralistic. Though the experience of each jiva exactly corresponds to the manifestation of the Hegelian idea, the individual personality is the most important and ultimate reality and everything else must be subordinated to the spiritual welfare of this fundamental reality."[148]

His ultimate concern comes out thus – "When we turn to Jaina thinkers, we are able to discover a possible solution of this problem of human conflict. Thousands of years ago, Jaina thinkers recognised the importance of the economic factor (this comes in the context of discussion on Marx) They realised that peace and harmony in human society could not be secured so long as there is uncontrolled accumulation of wealth by a few persons...Thus the internal conflict will be perpetuated. In order to escape from such an evil situation, the Jaina thinkers formulated an economic principle as an ethical and religious ideal....Agricultural produce should ....not be owned by any particular individual beyond a certain limit. Whatever is produced beyond a prescribed limit, should be considered as the property of the whole society...(and then he concludes)...The modern world still suffering from internal conflict will certainly benefit itself if it accepts and adopts the ideal prescribed by the Jaina teachers for the welfare of humanity."[149]

It was necessary to have digressed and made note of these

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[147] Ibid, pp.229-230
[148] Ibid, p.251
[149] Ibid, p.253-4.

points as it has a bearing on the way a text was seen and edited by an author – in our case, the way Nīlakeci was perceived, analysed by Chakravarti. Most of his works clearly show the working of a mind steeped in philosophical discussion and contemporary concerns of the immediate pre-independence and post-independence period. It is also a mind that is tooted in the Tamil Jaina society and eager to 'bring out' into the open the literature and traditions of this community towards a 'larger aim' to 'benefit society.' This has a bearing on the way Nīlakeci the text is approached by him. There isn't much focus on the purely literary merits of the work (which, incidentally, are substantiated by the text, in terms of the imagery, motifs and lyricism is used to describe places, characters there) and that is also not the aim of Chakravarti's work. What is important is to look at a Tamil Jaina text from the perspective of a philosopher – like him, with similar, if 'modern', concerns with other systems of thought of the world – and channelise the discussion at the that level of comparative philosophy.

About the 'radical' idea of taking a 'pēy' as the heroine of the text, he says, "After all, we have to remember that the author of Nīlakeci though he takes her – the kali of Pazhayanur – as the heroine of the story, frankly confesses that the story is merely a dream. It is an entirely imaginative creation. He wanted somebody who was revelling in cruelty and himsa to be converted to the doctrine of Ahiṁsā and to serve as a model of harmony and non violence. He could not think of anybody else than the Kāli of Pazhayanur."[150]

Though one will revert back to some of his more interesting (in terms of historically placing the text) points in the section that follows, at this point it should suffice to say that these few points (made in the Introduction to the text) apart, it does not

[150] A.Chakravarti, Nīlakeci, p. 18

credit his attention too much to focus on the folklore and Jaina interactions. However, one must place on record the fact that it was most commendable to have brought to light this Tamil text (as an important contribution to Tamil literature in the broader sense, not necessarily as a Jaina text merely) and a translated edition at that, in the year 1936. That this edition was reprinted thereafter, only as late as 1994 speaks for the kind of concerns of scholars in the periods following. And this second reprint too, unfortunately, leaves out the author's painstaking efforts in publishing the Tamil text form the manuscripts at his disposal. It would have been of use to scholars eager to look at his editorial comments in the text and the Tamil text itself.

Meanwhile, moving over to another text, Nīlakeci Viḷakkavurai, published in 1964, edited by Ponnusami Veluttevar Somasundaranar (Po.Ve.So, hereafter) and reprinted in 1973. This edition focusses on the text per se and in his introduction Po.Ve.So narrates the versions of Nīli story in the Śaivite tradition and gives a lucid treatise on the genre 'keci' such as Kuṇṭalakeci, Piṅkalakeci and so forth in Tamil literature. Po.Ve.So's work also highlights the literary merits (and flourish) inherent in Nīlakeci. Essentially, however, this is an edition that is meant for scholars of Tamil literature and thankfully the only edition of Nīlakeci in Tamil which is likely to see reprints, as the publishers are known to bring out periodic reprints of Tamil texts. It is a pity, however, that we should not have, for purposes of comparative evaluation, another similar text by a Tamil Jaina scholar. To be able to discern the work of someone from 'within' a tradition and one outside, as it were. It must be also mentioned that while A. Chakravarti confesses that a few verses in the Vedavāda section (about seven of them) are missing as the corresponding manuscripts were not then available to him)with a request he makes to the readers to help locate them) there is no such

mention (of lost stanzas) in Somasundaranar's book. But the point also remains, as to why wouldn't the Śaiva Siddhanta Publications Society have published A. Chakarvarti's work (which was originally published by the University of Tanjore)?Of course, Po.Ve.So's work seems to borrow heavily from Chakravarti's introduction with Nili's stories and the Nīlakeci (Jaina) version and so forth. An in-depth study of both these versions that one has mentioned would provide finer points of details regarding Nīlakeci, the text, in terms of variations in interpretations, the stress, focus, and so on, which in any case is not the immediate focus of this chapter.[151]

So we have works of two scholars on Nīlakeci, both focussing on the text as a religious, philosophical contribution in Tamil, without contextualising it substantially, say, historically, as to why the text came about in a certain period of history of Tamil Jaina community. Though Chakravarti does make a point or two to this effect, it is still not the primary concern. Moreover, coming at the time that they did, it may not be feasible to ask of these works questions we are able to pose today situated as we are in a certain point in history (especially of communities, more importantly communities marginalised). History of Tamil Jaina community was not the mirror through which these scholars were looking at Nīlakeci, as one is attempting to do.

However, coming to a rather recent work on Nīlakeci one finds, unfortunately, not much ground covered since the last time Po.Ve.So, or Chakravarti 'nainar' (as the Tamil Jainas address him) published their volumes. In fact, this work says nothing new on the subject. G.V. Saroja's "Jainism as Expounded in the

[151] However, it must be noted that a study of Nīlakeci in itself can be a very interesting, although daunting, enterprise.

Nīlakeci" [152] If the two earlier works on Nīlakeci could be 'excused' for reading the text in a non problematised manner, in their times, there is little that can be said for an article published in the very recent past, reproducing almost entirely what is visibly there for us in the text. The only point where Saroja differs (with the earlier scholars) is when she dates Nilakeci to 10th century AD, with no particular reason for it mentioned. She assumes (based on Chakravarti's contention) that the Kāḷi of Paḻayaṉūr is the heroine of Nīlakeci - although nowhere in the Nīlakeci text itself, is there any reference to this connection. If at all, it is the goddess of the temple (Kāḷi) who requests Nīli –Nīlakeci of the south (tenreciya Nīlakeci) to get rid of Muṇicandra, the monk.

Whether or not Kāḷi of Paḻayaṉūr could be identified with Nīlakeci of the text still needs to be analysed further. No definitive statements of this nature may be made which can have related complications for the contextual study of a text. But having made that statement, there is neither background to it nor any accompanying reason for it. She follows the same sequence of argument as set froth by Chakravarti on how different is this Kāḷi of Paḻayaṉūr from the other Nīli s in different works such as Cēkkiḻār's *Periyapurāṇam*, Gñānasampantar's *Tevāram* and Sāmantabhadra's *Ratnākaraṇṭaka*. Thereafter follow brief summaries of Nīlakeci's debate with different systems of thought – again, there are no new perspectives coming from these. What is amazing, however, is that there is no mention of what one would consider the most important point – which comes right in the beginning of the section in Nīlakeci – about caste and Pūtikaṉ calling Nīlakeci a Śūdra. One wonders as to why a major point such as this would be ignored altogether in a work, coming as

[152] In N.N.Bhattacharya, ed, Jainism and Prakrit in Ancient and Medieval

it is, in 1994, despite a context of social and cultural historical scholarship engaged in the issue of caste in ancient and medieval India. Instead, Saroja briefly summarises Nīlakeci's take on authorship of the Vedas.

It is in this context that one seeks to review Nīlakeci, through questions that should probably help take a closer, serious look at the significance of this work, from the point of view of the history of Tamil Jaina community or Jainism in Tamiḻakam. And it is also meant to reinstate the point that a text, such as Nīlakeci, could be utilised as one of the important sources in analysing constructs such as community, identity, in this case, of a living (historical) community such as the Tamil Jainas. And this, one must say, is only an initial step in that direction. And does not in any way claim to be conclusive (as no study could claim to be so). It is meant to merely give a certain direction to a discourse, missed out in most previous studies so far on Tamiḻakam and the Tamil Jaina community.

Section 4

Recasting / Re-imaging a Persona, an Idiom: a (Tamil)

India, Manohar, Delhi, 1994; pp.185-197

Jaina-Folk Interface?[153]

In most studies on the history of Tamilnadu scholars have tended to focus more on the issue of brāhmiṇical hegemony, built over centuries and within the confines of this paradigm, on the socio-political and cultural hegemony, giving some excellent treatises on various aspects of the Tamil social and political history. Wherever 'non' brāhmiṇical, non 'Hindu' traditions have been studied, the focus has again been directly or indirectly on looking at these as the alternate, in contra-position or a counter to the overarching, dominant religion-temple-land-resources-polity-brāhmiṇism (not necessarily in that sequential order) as the moving force most explanations for the making of this dominant / hegemonic system have rested on the notion of brāhmiṇical tradition 'incorporating' elements of the 'folk' and making an 'inclusive', as it were, religious system, closely connected to, and responsible for, certain kinds of economic, social and political relations. What is seen as 'folk' / 'popular' (at times, 'Dravidian', by scholars like Zvelebil, for instance) in most of these studies, has existed at the base / substratum, to be 'picked-up' and incorporated by the brāhmiṇical ideology, thereby making for a 'dominant' force in various ways. Most of these scholarly treatises, however, fail to consider similar interactions and incorporations, perhaps, when it comes to religious systems such as Buddhism and Jainism in Tamilnadu. Both these systems seem to have had only the dominant brāhmiṇical paradigm to contest with, or challenge, or each

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[153] This title owes to a paper I presented (titled "Retrieving, Seeking (An)other Woman, (An)other Goddess") in Chennai on 13-14th December 2003, organised by the Prakriti Foundation, "Women and Goddesses: Reimaging the Feminine in Tamil Cinema" The idea of 'retrieving' metamorphosed into 'Re-casting' thanks to this event. One sincerely thanks Ranvir Shah and V.R.Devika, for, in having invited me to talk, they indirectly coerced me into those phenomenal sessions with amma, my mother, engaging with the Viḷḷuppāṭṭu and Nīli Nāṭakam versions of Nīli story. The 'moment' of those lovely sessions with my mother, reinstated some views on the 'pēy' Nīli, as also created the main body of this chapter. As it did for my talk at that point, which amma could not be part of.

other; or to simply lose out to the other, be marginalised. What about Buddhist-'folk' or Jaina-'folk' interface? Was there one / were there a few such? What forms did they operate through / with, in early, medieval Tamiḻakam?

At another level, scholars (especially non Indian scholars) have shown almost obsessive inclination towards and interest in the Tamil 'popular' / 'folk' 'virgin' goddess concept. More often than not, in the process, they have focussed exclusively, extensively on the Purāṇic myths and goddesses in a larger Hindu / brāhmiṇical paradigm and speak for a kind syncretism or synthesis of what is essentially folk-Tamil and Purāṇic-Sanskritic-brāhmiṇical, together forming a Tamil cultural ethos, as it stands today. For instance, David Shulman, in most of his studies on the temple culture and Tamil temple myths, among others, refers to a certain kind of syncretism and synthesis. "A major contribution to the formation of Tamil culture was undoubtedly made by the brahmins, who became the custodians, and in some cases, the creators or the traditions of Tamil shrines..."Speaking of the sthalapurāṇas, "composed under significant Brāhmiṇ influence" he says, "here...we glimpse the unifying, synthesising, fertlising force that brāhmiṇism has represented in the history of Tamilnadu. It is largely this force that allows us to speak of a single, distinctive system of Tamil mythology incorporated in literary texts composed over a period ..." [154] Shulman's concern was the Śaivite tradition and the above statements were made in that context. But the problem, somewhere, is the concentration and focus on this tradition to almost the exclusion of many others, on the one hand; but more important, to speak for what is termed the "Tamil" culture as having been built by these interactive processes with brāhmiṇism as an essential ingredient therein,

[154] David Shulman, Tamil Temple Myths: Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the South Indian Śaiva Tradition, Princeton University Press, 1980; p.8

or the "fertilising force". And the problem lies exactly in the latter. Especially, when two other important religions, Jainism and Buddhism, as many other lesser known(much less studied) systems of thought, along with popular and folk traditions and systems have made this larger 'Tamil' culture. Moreover, it denies any kind of inherent conflict and tension within the process of this 'synthesising'. For instance, speaking of the idea of the goddess' two forms – the violent, virginal and the bride, mother – Shulman rationalises about the way in which both these forms (traditions) gain an acceptable space in the bhakti tradition, with the violent elements relegated to the periphery of a shrine and the 'pure' aspect retained within. There "both realms are sacred, even if the purāṇic texts, true to the Upaniṣadic legacy and the brāhmiṇical ideal of purity, assert the superiority of the isolated, other worldly shrine. Power, or the goddess, can never be dispensed with completely, unless life itself is finally negated Tamil bhakti religion is too much in love with life...Both goals, purity and power, persist in the bhakti tradition; the ordering of the shrine, with the virgin goddess separate and the god with his 'tame' wife located in the centre, reflects the continuing conflict between the two vital religious ideals."[155]

The above explanation neatly compartmentalises spaces for both these 'opposites' in the bhakti tradition; but then, where would a character / form/ concept such as that of 'pēy' Nīli's fit into this whole paradigm? Or, would it fit at all? Considering, especially, that the fear element in the pēy stories 'forcibly' make a demand for a shrine for these pēy s. And at some point or the other, these temples have an amalgam of both brāhmiṇical rituals and animal sacrifices and are deities almost invariably, of those that come form the fringes of the social

[155] Ibid, pp.222-23

order, the lower castes and tribes. Is this a movement of 'inclusion' at one level, that the ambivalent force has been 'at least' granted the periphery? Or would it be that it just has to be 'outside of' and at the periphery (metaphorically in a perpetually 'pēy' / ambivalent status) because it cannot be included in the prevailing norms of codified temple worship and religion? These are difficult questions to answer. And these will remain problematic issues unless there is an effort to look at possibilities of other, affirmative (or even otherwise) traditions outside of the purāṇic / Sanskritic / brāhmiṇical paradigm that have been focussed for many years. Where is the place, in these kinds of analyses, for the story of Nīli and her transformation into Nīlakeci, a Jaina philosopher-preacher (even if she were seen as a fictitious character, and product of a dream, by the author of the work Nīlakeci)? Isn't there a need to look beyond the 'given' 'Tamil' (which is mostly read as popular or 'little' tradition) meeting or merging with the Purāṇic / brāhmiṇical to create a so-called 'composite' culture of 'synthesis'? What were those elements that were never included? Or were consciously excluded? In this sense, the text Nilakeci throws open numerous questions about an organised so-called-heterodox' religion such as Jainism's interface with the 'base' / 'popular'. The larger 'Tamil' mythic corpus, or cultural paradigm needs to be seen (and never seen in scholarship so far) as not necessarily or essentially the merger of brāhmiṇical-folk, but as one with several underlying layers of interactions with such systems as Buddhist and Jaina hitherto mostly considered of 'non-sensual' orientation and therefore disenchanted by the popular rituals and traditions necessarily oriented towards the sensual and intimate god / deity – human relationships (referring here, particularly to the bhakti concept). In the last case, one must mention an effort made in this direction in the brilliant monograph on the Pattini cult (written not recently but till date used as an excellent

document on Sinhala Buddhism) and Buddhism in Sri Lanka by Gananath Obeyesekere. [156]

Here Buddhism is shown as using the popular ('folk') Pattini cult (Pattini, deified in Tamil folk tradition even before she 'moved' to Sri Lanka[157]) making her an 'eligible' candidate, so to speak, for Buddhahood. Obeyesekere's intention is to look at institutionalisation of the cult. And importantly, the goddess Pattini is both a 'Hindu' and a 'Buddhist' deity in Sri Lanka and both have added to the mythic corpus of this cult, with a central shrine in the Sabaragamuva province at Navagamuva. The cult is supposed to have diffused into Sri Lanka and operated in a cultural context of the Sinhalas. In the Buddhist context she is an aspirant for Buddhahood.

However, in the Sri Lankan context, which Obeyesekere analysed in his work, Buddhism is the overwhelming paradigm. And the Buddhist tradition takes a character like Pattini, already by then deified in popular religion, to give her a Buddhist dimension. In this sense, if we look at Nīlakeci (where there is certainly no ritual dimension or religious compulsion involved, most likely) the author creates a whole new character out of an infamous one, giving the character an entirely new dimension. The difference is, however, that unlike Kaṇṇaki who became Pattini (the goddess) Nīlakeci remains a character bound within a text and does not assume deified status in the Jaina religious system. The intriguing question here (which one is not inclined or qualified enough, yet, to answer / resolve) is 'why'?

What is important here, is that Buddhist and Jaina traditions

[156] Gananath Obeyesekere, The Cult of Goddess Pattini, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1984

[157] Ibid, p.363 – after 5th, before 6th century AD.

too had been open to influences (and were also influencing) the popular, 'non' brāhmiṇical traditions prevalent in their time and it is necessary to recognise these in order to move away from the 'plot' (if one may use the term) of brāhmiṇisation altogether. For what are referred to as 'dominant' and 'marginal' (which one also tends to use) traditions, inasmuch as there are historical processes that create them, are also created and reiterated in historical writing and reconstruction – highlighting them at a sustained level to the exclusion of others.[158]

In this context then, one will look at the manner in which the Tamil Jaina tradition (or a representative of that tradition) seeks a culmination, a climax, to long pathetic history of the possessing , restless, angry, Nīli , the pēy, by making her a 'tamed' and 'reformed' lay aspirant and eventually preacher –philosopher of the Jaina doctrine. Though there is almost negligible 'space' or 'distance' between her receiving an enlightened ordainment at the feet of Muṇicandra and her donning the role of a fierce, confirmed debater of Jainism thereafter, ready to take on the other systems of thought. The Jaina muni (or creator of the text) gives her the much needed direction (so to say) towards aparigraha (non attachment) / non possession both figuratively and in terms of her identity as 'pēy' in local Tamil tradition of the region, which was a non possibility so long as she remained confined in the folk (and Śaivite tevāram) idiom. Of course, Pa<u>l</u>aya<u>n</u>ūr Nīli, by virtue of her anger and vulnerability to destroying, does get a shrine (which again she asks for, as one of the versions seen earlier in

[158] This point is meant as a general observation of the larger trend in most (not all) writing on religion and religious processes. There is no denying the fact that this larger trend has in its own ways sharpened the points of debate and discourse on brāhmiṇical and purāṇic religious processes. One wishes there were (and there is not) a similar intensity of debate and discourse on Buddhist and Jaina religious processes (within these

this chapter, notes) to keep her appeased. In this sense, of course, she gets a status of a goddess, but she would still remain a violent, possessing goddess. That part of her life story will never let go of her. In this sense, how does it help to look at her from a different mirror as the Tamil Jaina author of Nīlakeci did?

Recasting / Re-imaging Nīli (in) to Nīlakeci: the Point of 'Movement'

Viḷḷuppāṭṭu, Nīli Nāṭakam, and other versions – which we encountered at the beginning of the chapter - will be analysed here. The genesis / origin story of Nīlakeci text lies, as the text's anonymous author says right at the onset, in a dream, which revealed the events as narrated in the text. The author also makes a point about not writing exactly within the 'rules' of the traditional agamas. "*kaṉaviṉṉitu kaṇṭavarē*" (this , I saw in a dream); "*paṇṭākamattuṭa payilāvuṟai yeṉṟu mikkār vīṇṭiṇkiṭaṉai venkulārvital vēṇṭu veṉyāṉ.*" [159](I admit to the knowledgeable ones that this text is not in accordance with our old āgamas).

Both these 'admissions' are important. That the events unfolding here are merely part of the author's dream, in a sense, seems to imply that the creator of the text pre-empts efforts to link what follows in the course of the text to an event or a character. In this sense, although the character is indeed based on what would be perceived – both by the Jaina laity / scholars who might read the text and the non Jainas 'others' form other traditions – to be indeed the pēy Nīli. Stating that the text does not follow the rules of the āgamas then perhaps implies what the creator of the text feared might happen, with the introduction

religions, which are usually seen as fossilised) so far as work on religion in Tamiḻakam (and these religions) is concerned.

[159] P.Ve.So, verse.3; p.1

of a central character with a background such as that of Nīli.

The author[160] even in that time was radically altering a certain form of popularising the Jaina doctrine which had the probability of being received with a certain amount of skepticism. And one believes it may not have been the 'form' as much as the 'content', especially the 'receptacle' of the content, namely, Nīlakeci or Nīli the pēy, that was likely to be questioned by the 'scholarly' audience the author is addressing. Plus, making Nīli / Nīlakeci merely part of an elaborate dream sequence removes the idea of the existence of such a character, or the reality of such an event.

It is probable that since the text deals with a 'high-end' subject such as comparative evaluation of Jaina philosophy with other philosophies, it may have necessitated the author to clarify what were likely points of 'attack' or criticism – how could a pey like Nīli be capable of debating with the important teachers of the time considering her own antecedents? Pre-empting such a critique it was simpler to set the context and link the entire manuscript to a genesis unlikely to be questioned, namely, a dream. In that sense, all the debates, too, and the characters therein, were all part of a dream. But though they were part of a dream the characters such as Kuṇṭalakeci, the Buddha, Mokkala, etc were real characters and not fictitious, even if they were used in the text for a specific purpose. The author has picked up important names, figures of the time and woven a story around all of these. Plus there is the model of Kuṇṭalakeci

[160] A point that one will not debate here but is important nevertheless – is that when no one knows who exactly is the author of Nīlakeci (and only knows of the commentator), it is interesting that no one wishes to give the author the female gender. It may not be impossible to conjecture that the author of Nīlakeci could have been female, considering the number of nuns and woman teachers of Jainism mentioned in records. Until this issue is resolved one may proceed with this possibility and hence one uses the term author, creator, without attributing a particular gender to the author.

the Buddhist text preceding this. The author is at the same time familiar with the legend of Nīli, in order to have successfully built a theme around her. Making her a character of a dream would give the author enough freedom to mould her story in any which way that s/he wanted, without having to explain such as 'face-lift'. Thus more has to be read into the statement to the author at the onset, than take it at its face value. As A. Chakravarti had done, as noted elsewhere in this chapter.

Two points need to be noted here – one, that even if this was a dream, and an entirely imaginative creation, there was a reason behind it. Chakravarti himself confesses to it when he says, the author required a character "revelling in cruelty" to convert into an embodiment of ahimsa. In that sense, there is a definitive intention in taking non other than "the Kāli of Pazhayanur" (if she is Kāli if Paḻayaṉūr, which Chakravarti believes). Though the dream may have been born of imagination, the author is not completely 'innocent' of the implications of such an exercise. Even if Nīli of Nīlakeci was the "Kāli of Pazhayanur." [161] Yet the author was making a departure both form within the tradition and from the point of view of re-presenting a popular cultic figure in an altogether new form.

In a different context (but which may not be altogether unrelated in terms of a concept) Kunal Chakrabarti [162] points out that it may be important to seek as to "how an individual author is revealed in the text, but where the discourse comes from..." [163] The discourse, in this case, came from a need to place a Jaina ideal in a non Jaina context (for purposes of proselytising,

[161] Other versions of Nīli story seem to say that Nīli was one of the ambivalent deities identified with Kali at some later point, perhaps. In Nīlakeci, in fact, the Kāḷi of the temple where Muṇicantra is doing penance requests Nīli of the south to assist her in driving him away. There is no indication anywhere in Nīlakeci, the text that she is Kāli of Paḻayaṉūr.
[162] Kunal Chakrabarti, Religious Process: the Purāṇas and the Making of a Regional Tradition, OUP, Delhi, 2001

perhaps) through an idiom that was familiar to the region the author unmistakably belonged to – where the 'sceptre' of Nīli (had) loomed large, in what was then Toṇṭaimaṇṭalanāḍu or north Arcot district of later periods; in and around Tiruvālaṅkāṭu, which the Śaivites made popular as the site of the dance of Śiva and defeat or submission of Kāḷi. A discourse was being created – by breaking the stereotype of a quintessential Tamil (?) form / idiom of the possession spirit stuck in a cycle of retribution and appeasement. The discourse in this case was not an a priori, but being created – a discourse that broke free from patterns even within Jainism (as the text itself admits). For, here was this 'pēy' / possession woman and in this sense, not part of 'this-world' (in fact part of a certain 'nether-world' in a sense, that Jainism negates in its cosmogony – there are worlds inhabited by the vasudevas, vyantara devatas, and so forth; but the world Nīli inhabited, until then, was not something pure Jaina tradition would accept) in fact forced to become a pey (in the popular tradition) on account of her unnatural death. She was murdered, as we have seen in the different versions. And what's more, she avenged her murder with another act of violence, killing and drinking the blood of her husband of the previous birth. So Nīli / Nīlakeci was also someone who had killed – again, an anomaly for the ideal Jaina type for being granted the privilege of proving the superiority of its principles.

In recasting this form / idiom a whole new "discourse" of the period was being formulated. That is how one would like to 'reveal' the position of the author of Nīlakeci in the Tamil Jaina tradition. Be that as it may, there is one section of the text (Nīlakeci) where the likely friction, by virtue of adapting this idiom, is revealed and strangely enough, it is friction caused by

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[163] Ibid, p.28

the brāhminical tradition - in the Vedavādaccarukkam. Here, as one has noted, the Vedic teacher Pūtika calls Nīlakeci a 'śūdra' and makes a comment on her eligibility to critique the Vedas. This point is important since it brings out into the open – through the debate – what would be the likely points of criticism to the idea of giving Nīli the important position of examining all our philosophical traditions and religious systems. And the criticism of this kind (where caste and status become most important) happens from no other system but the Vedic (brāhminical) in this text. Even though the author of Nīlakeci makes a confessional point about going outside the agamic fold in writing text, one may venture the point that the Jaina tradition seems to have given relative freedom and space for author (for most part, 'named' and not anonymous unlike in the Vedic tradition) to experiment with ways and means to make that 'Jaina' point. This is clear also from the way the text Cīvakacintāmaṇi (in Tamil) styles itself. Here again, the genesis of the text is laid out clearly by the author. The context (of the composition – the way it was created) is that of ridicule by members of one of the Tamil Caṅkams – a statement that Jaina textual tradition (or authorship) could never write a single erotic verse. The presumption (behind this ridicule) was that the Jaina tradition was more concerned with the non sensual and the austere and not well versed with the worldly ways. Responding to this the author Tiruttakkattēvar wrote this epic which is now part of the five mahākāvyas, peruṅkāppiyam in Tamil. This, of courser, is the legend associated with the birth of Cīvakacintāmaṇi, story of the king Cīvaka and his adventures and sexual affairs. But it may well have to do with one angle of criticism that may have been in vogue in that period about Jaina textual tradition in general. Hence, while the Jaina point is made, after all, the author made use of situations and ways to do so, with, at the same time, a rationale given for the use of such as theme. Thus, explanation for the

genesis of the work, and its nature, is not uncommon. While the genesis of Cīvakacintāmaṇi would be criticism at the Tamil Caṅkam, for Nīlakeci it was the dream, and a related explanation. There is always, it seems, a reason for the text to have been. Continuing with the question of authorship and genesis of Nīlakeci, the text (or characters in the dream who became part of the text) one wishes to record here an interesting allusion to the 4th century BC Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi (the Master Zhuang, of Chuang Tzu) in a discussion on authorship – of course in a totally different context. But the context it mentions is interesting enough to consider. And one quotes – "Once Zhuang Zhou dreamed of himself being a butterfly; he was really a butterfly fluttering around, happy...knowing not that he was Zhou. After a while, he woke up, and he was surprisingly Zhyang Zhou himself. It was not clear whether it was Zhou who had dreamt of being a butterfly or it was the butterfly who had dreamed of Zhou. Yet there must be differentiation between Zhou and the butterfly; and this is called the transformation of things."[164]

This story persuaded one to look at some connections so far as Nīlakeci the text is concerned. Is Nīli of Paḻayaṉūr, for instance, being dreamt of, or is she 'extracting' her own text, or meta-narrative; or, is the dream (re) constructing her? One is simply trying to posit another case for the process of 'Nīli-to-Jaina philosopher Nīlakeci' movement, and that is – the Paḻayaṉūr Nīli idiom by itself is a strong and powerful one, existing independent of all major organised religious systems in Tamilnadu at one point. This idiom becomes so important that it needs to be acknowledged by systems that come into contact with it (or come within its 'zone') – hence we have several versions of the story, with even the tevāram of the Śaivite bards making a mention of it in their own context. There,

[164] Sean Burke, ed, Authorship: from Plato to the Post modern, a Reader, Edinburgh University Press, 1995;p.xv

the idiom (Nīli) extracts its own place and position within a system. And in the Jaina Tamil text, Nīli-Nīlakeci is being entirely reconstructed / re constituted. Both approaches to the Nīli idiom would seem to convey both these positions. In this sense, it may be important to consider an altogether parallel stream of thought at a conceptual level – whether it was that Nīli be 'picked up' from her popular locale / narrative. That is to say, that her character, pre se, becomes the most important element to make a story, a point out of. So, no tradition can ignore or negate her. Thus the questions whether ,"creative imagination guide(s) the composition, or is the writer like the scrawl of an alien power trying out a new pen"(or) "is the author the producer of the text or its product"[165] in the case of / with Nīlakeci, becomes crucial, but difficult to answer in a simplistic manner. Especially since, at the level of methodology, this critical question of authorship of traditions, in the case of at least Tamil (Jaina or otherwise) textual tradition has not been problematised yet to an adequate degree – so as to dwell on just this one aspect.

If one could agree with Foucault when he says that the "author's name.....is situated in the breach, among the discontinuities, which gives rise to new groups of discourse and their singular mode of existence"[166] Nīlakeci and as a text with an author (in the sense that the "author" characterise(s) the existence, circulation and operation of certain discourses within a society"[167]) qualify for an examination that goes beyond the text's immediate objective and what it claims to convey, at the fact value. There are deeper layers within this text that has, on the face of it, has a simplistic aim. To take just one instance, the author of Nīlakeci (if it is presumed it is a 'male') assumes

[165] Ibid, p.xv
[166] Michel Foucault, "What is an Author" (pp233-246), reproduced in Sean Burke, op.cit. p.235

the female voice (that of Nīlakeci) in the various debates, and in that sense the Jaina philosophy too, then, acquires the female voice, and this is important, in a context where within Digambara tradition women are not eligible for acquiring moksa (the ultimate liberation) and in a general sense, too, women are not believed to have the wherewithal to work towards this aim. At the very best, through ritualistic discipline they may be re-born as male and attain liberation. In this sense, selecting a female character (when the author could well have composed the same text using a male voice as the one debating the other systems) seems significant. Again, the author speaks for the "śūdra" caste when the Vedavādin Pūtikan̲ ridicules Nīlakeci as a sudra and hence unqualified to critique the vedas. In these cases, somewhere, the author 'dies' to let the characters – steeped in their won cultural context – speak for themselves while the author simply records their respective points of view. A similar 'event' in the text – where the character is what the character 'is', outside of, the textual 'situation', so to speak, occurs when Nīlakeci becomes (reverts to) pēy, all over again to prove a point to the materialist Piśācakan. Here perhaps the character rebels against the author of the text, although for a brief moment and becomes what she is / has been, historically, and culturally, a pēy. At this point the text seems to have failed the character of Nīlakeci (the Jaina philosopher) herself by allowing for that brief moment to Nīli to take shape, even if it was for the benefit of Nīlakeci. Thus the larger context of the idiom of pey of Pal̲ayan̲ūr is its own dominant form, although subtle, yet strong and capable of overtaking other interpretations at appropriate moments. And that is the larger context the author operates in, and locates herself / himself in. Hence, it is a person rooted in a specific context with its metaphors and motifs that would naturally

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[167] Ibid, p.235

appear in the work. With all the confessions made at the onset (about the dream) the basic truth is that the dream state happens to be nothing apart from the author's own immediate cultural context. In fact the author distances from the text at this point. And if we accept what Chakravarti says about the author being a convert to Jainism[168], it serves our purpose to say that Paḻayaṉūr Nīli is a potent folk cultural idiom being recast in an authored work of the time to fit into the enterprise.

Let us move now to another layer of discussion related to the question of authorship in the text Nīlakeci. It is interesting that Nīlakeci questions the claim of the Vedic teacher of the omniscience of the Vedas and that they do not have an author / or authors. That they are 'apouruśeya'. In her discussion on the subject we see the Jaina idea on textual tradition and authorship. Nīlakeci's point is that "the Veda consists of sentences constituted by words, which in their turn, by letters. Since there is no fundamental difference between the language of the Vedas and the language of the ordinary literary works, both must be considered as having been produced by some intelligent person."[169]

"katiyavar tampeya riṉṉavai
cuṭṭina kāṭṭaliṉu
mutiyavar nāḷkalo ṭoppila
vippoḻu tottaliṉum
vitiyatu vātaliṉ vedattai
yāñcolluñ kīttataip ppoṟ
putiyatu veyeṉac collutu

[168] In the 5th stanza of Nīlakeci (Po.Ve.So edn) there is reference to a Tevar from whom the author learnt the doctrine of the Jina; in this connection, Chakravarti says, "if the reference to the fifth stanza... is a reference to the author of Kural, then it may be inferred that the author of Nīlakeci was a direct student of the author of the Kuṟaḷ...(and) a convert to Jainism..." (Chakravarti, Nīlakeci, p.10)
[169] Chakravarti, Ibid, p. 309

nāmatu poruruñtu menṟaḷ"[170]

Nīlakeci here uses the term "*yāñcolluñ kittataip ppoṟ*" (like the Gītā) and "*katiyavar tam peyar iṉṉavai cuṭṭina kāṭṭaliṉum mutiyavar nāḷkalōṭu oppu ila*" (the names associated with the Vedas are ones of a contemporary period and not from older times; and like the literary works – "gītam" – of this period, use similar language). In Po.Ve.So's edition, he translates "yām collum kītattaippoṟ" as "like the words of those people who composed Kumāra Sambhavam and the like" while Chakravarti simply translates this as "literary works" and one tends to agree with the latter. It is clear that Nīlakeci stresses on the 'this-worldliness' of the Vedas in these arguments and as the Jaina works almost alwars had, and mentioned, authors of their works, the fact that Vedas could have no author, was not acceptable to the Jaina thinking on these matters.

To this criticism, the Veda teacher Pūtikaṉ points out that the authors named by Nīlakeci were not authors, per se, but merely those 'transmitting' the content of the Vedas (Vedas being timeless, authorless) to the world. In this context one would point out that the brāhmiṇs were clever to devise a method of giving Vedas an ultimate supernatural quality. Since, perhaps as Barthes had (in a different context) pointed out (and it agrees with this idea that) "to give a text an author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final, signified, to close the writing."[171] And in countering this effort, Nīlakeci fixes a time, period and authorial responsibility for the Vedic literature so that it may be conceived of as a form born of 'god', as it was claimed.

The Site of Nīli; and the Recasting

Paḻayaṉūr, the site of the legend of Nīli is a place that needs

[170] Po.Ve.So, verse.832; p.684

[171] Roland Barthes, "The Death of an Author" (pp.125 -130) in Sean Burke, op.cit, p.128-9

some attention. "Palayanūr in Palayanūr nādu is identified with the village of the same name close to Tiruvālangādu in the Tiruttani division of the Chittoor district. The Tiruvālangādu plates of the Chola king Rajendra Chola I record the grant of this village to the Śiva temple at Tiruvālangādu. In the Tevāram hymns this latter place is called Palaiyanūr Ālangādu (i.e, Ālangādu near Palaiyanūr)."[172] The above inscription in the 11th year of Nrpatungadeva mentions that the assembly of Perumalai-ūr, a brahmadēya in Kākkalūr-nādu agreed to grant a certain measure of paddy and ghee as offerings to the deity at "Tiruvālangādu in Palaiyanūr nādu." Another offering is made to the same deity of this temple by the assembly of Pulvelūr in Eyir-kōttam of "one uri (unit) of oil daily for burning the perpetual lamp."[173] Again, the Tamil portion of the Tiruvālangādu plates of Rājendra I, addresses the nāttār and other locality groups in Melmalai Palayanūr nādu and directs that the village Palaiyanūr, for which place the locality was named and which was a brāhmin (endowed) village (brahmadēya) was now to become a village subject to regular dues from cultivators (vellan-vakai) and these were to be granted to the temple of Tiruvālangādu as devadāna.[174]

The site, as we can see, or is environs, where the Nīli story of revenge is played out, is that of brāhmin settlements and in the above inscription the vellālas of the village are instructed to pay dues to the temple of Natarāja – now this being a temple to the dancing Śiva also reasserts and reconfirms the myth of Śiva defeating Kāli in a dance competition which had happened here. And in the version where this myth is narrated also mentions this as having been the site of Kāli. A Kāli shrine is said to have existed here/ From the story of Palayanūr Nīli and this myth, it

[172] South Indian Inscriptions (SII), no. 64 (AR 460 of 1905); pp.26-27.
[173] Ibid, No.66 (AR 461 of 1905), p.27
[174] SII, vol. V, No. 3; p.427

may not be too conjectural to infer that this place had been a stronghold of the goddess cult which later got fused into one of Śaivite worship, with the Śiva's dance myth clearly establishing the ascendance / superiority of the (male) god over others. In the Tevāram version, consequently, and in the Nīli Nāṭakam version of the Nīli story, the influence of brāhmiṇical values and mores is unmistakably felt, and the later Śaivite-brāhmiṇical hegemony over the region of this story may have a lot to do with this kind of rendering. The fact that so many versions of the Nīli story existed also reflects the significance and prevalence of an earlier local narrative of this region, deeply associated with a female cult. In fact as one has noted earlier, the name of Nīli is known and in Cilappatikāram. The goddess of Madurai tells Kaṇṇaki she was Nīli in a previous birth. In the same epic Nīli is one of the many names of the mother goddess. One has noted versions where Nīli commands that a temple be built for her, and in another version gets a temple built after an act of vengeance on the priest by killing his daughter (some viḷḷuppāṭṭukkārars, of some regions, narrate this story in prose form after the viḷḷuppāṭṭu has been sung, as one also noted earlier) when the priest built the shrine for her to keep her calm and appeased - which implies that a temple to this deity existed in these parts. The very fact hat so many versions of the Nīli story exist also proves her cultic importance in these parts and gradually her spread, towards the north Arcot region.

Now the site of Paḻayaṉūr and the Nīli story set against this backdrop is important. One, there seems to have been, around 8th-9th century AD, expansion of brāhmiṇ settlements surrounding this area, and the importance of Naṭarāja temple here. It is also sometime around this period that Gñānasampantar, the Śaivite bard pays his visits to these places (tours extensively around north and south Arcot district) in

many of the areas settled by Tamil Jainas. In fact, Gñānasampantar alludes to the myth of Śiva defeating Kāḷi in a dance at this place. Cēkkiḻār and Sampantar both refer to the Nīli story in their verse. Interestingly, there is yet another angle to the site – the presence of veḷḷāḷas. The inscription mentioned earlier here, refer to the veḷḷāṉ vakai – tax payable by the veḷḷāḷas to the Naṭarāja temple here. In the Nīli story, too, the vellalas have an important place. The motif of 70 veḷḷāḷas jumping into a burning pyre has been mentioned. And this act of the veḷḷāḷas finds an almost central place in most Śaivite rendering of the Nīli story. It is possible that the motif of the 'word-bound' veḷḷāḷas was part of another legend, folklore that merged into the Nīli story at some point. Thus, this region seems to have had a strong veḷḷāḷa presence (besides that of the brāhmiṇs) which may have been instrumental in the merging of this motif, that of the veḷḷāḷas. In this connection Shanmuga Sundaram makes an interesting point. He notes that a *tīkkuḷi maṇṭapam* (a platform for fire walking / or a space for a pyre) was set up in Paḻayaṉūr in the year 1966. He remarks that Nīli worship in Paḻayaṉūr must have given way to the worship of veḷḷāḷas, and the hence this maṇṭapam. [175]

The site of Nīli story is important also in terms of how the story shapes and how each version replays this basic story. There is yet another aspect to this story which seems to be the peculiarity of not just this, but many other stories of the 'wronged woman' who possesses, avenges, or transforms (into a pey after her death by deceit). These sites are, more often than not, what may be called ambivalent, no-person zones (even in a 'physiographic' sense). Nīli's husband (of the former birth, now a merchant in the second birth) has to pass through this tract between two places, Kāñcipuram and Paḻayaṉūr. It is in

[175] Shanmuga Sundaram, Paḻayaṉūr Nīli, 1978, p.27

this no-person / no-human zone that Nīli 'possesses' him (metaphorically speaking) or accosts him (literally). In most Tamil narratives involving tales of the pey / possession spirits, this is the kind of site (a midway) that is dreaded and most infamous. Why is this site always connected to things 'bad', 'evil', 'sinister' and dark? Who does this site belong to, in the first place? Is this kind of association of this site – with things dark, bad, at the least ambivalent – meant to keep some kinds of places (perhaps people, or even cults or cultic figures) on the fringes?

In another sense, this site (where Nīli gets hold of her former-life husband) is also one of transcendence from one form to another in many such stories. For instance, Bhadra transcends to the life of a nirgrantha (and later Buddhist nun, Kuṇṭalakeci) in one such similar site, having got rid of her husband, whom she kills. A similar case is that of the (chaste) wife turning into Ambicā, the Jaina yaksi [176]. Kāraikkāl ammaiyār, too, 'throws' her worldly associations (both literally and symbolically by shedding her clothes and adornments) in one such site, to become a complete Śiva bhakta from having been a dutiful wife. Sites such as these may be seen as equivalent, in some senses, to the palai tiṇai concept of early Tamil Caṅkam poetry – the ecotype that does not have a specific characteristic feature defining it. But, interestingly, it is also a place associated with travellers (and bandits) or 'movement' from, or towards, which symbolises the transformation of one form into another as is the case of these legendary women characters. This site is one on the periphery of land-ownership-resources-temple-bhakti paradigm of the brahminical system as well. The need to control the pēy of folk

[176] The story of Ambicā will be narrated here, in the context of common motifs in folklore (and tales of transformation, transcendence).

goddess monopolising this region is signified in the version of Nīli's story where thorns are placed on her head to control her prowess, by the temple priest. This control also extends to control and suppression, and fixing, perhaps, of a wandering tale and a wandering spirit outside of the accepted brāhminịcal norms and practices and ritual context. Again, it also goes on to control and hegemonise the site / sphere of the tale and the people to whom the metaphor / idiom of Nīli (or such goddesses) belonged, as also the (lower) caste story teller who keeps this idiom / story alive. The temple to Nīli in one of the versions and the making of space for rootedness of the shrine (deity) through a brāhminịcal control mechanism also begins with this control of the pēy and the folk idiom. Śiva's dance and defeating Kāḷi of Paḻayaṉūr (or may be Nīli, as she may have been known earlier) has as its sub text this control of the folk idiom. A comparison of the viḷḷuppāṭṭu version of Nīli story and the Tevāram (and other narratives influenced by it) and Jaina versions of the Nīli tale all do suppress the wandering / possession woman in their own ways (besides inferiorising the folk base of the story). Only, in the Jaina text, Nīli is given an affirmative voice through her character while the Tevāram works show her ultimately controlled by a priestly, temple based context. And yet, she remains an ambivalent figure, 'sanitised', yet not eligible for a status akin to the goddesses in the Purāṇic fold.

In this context what is this Jaina-folk interface that one refers to? How and when does it operate and what does it do to the Nīli legend? Before taking up this issue, it would do well to draw attention to a few other 'non- Nīli tales that had been in circulation in Tamiḻakam over a period of time. This is just to look at ways in which traditions (Śaivite or Buddhist or Jaina)

Kāraikkāl ammaiyār's (5th- 6th centuries AD) story also closely follows

incorporated these layers of folklore, many of them with common motifs, as we shall now see. That is to say that they were operating in a common context and the ways they used these themes depended on the message they wished to convey and the audience they wished to convey them to. Let me take up for discussion four tales – Nīlakeci / Nīli of the Jaina text Ratnākaraṇṭaka Śrāvakācāra (different from the Nīli of Nīlakeci) and Māriammaṉ; and that of Ambicā, the yakṣi of the tīrthankara Neminatha and the Śaiva saint Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār. The stories of Māriammaṉ and Nīlakeci / Nīli have parallels as do those of Ambicā and Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār.

The Stories, briefly

Nīli is the beautiful daughter of a Jaina merchant of Bṛgukaccha. One day another merchant's son named Sāgaradatta (a Buddhist) chanced to see her and fell in love with her. He desired to be married to her, but since he was a Buddhist, Nīli's father wouldn't give his consent. Sāgaradatta's father, to keep his son's heart, claimed that they followed the Jaina faith and thus got them married. Once Nīli was married, she realised, by and by, that she and her father had been cheated, and that her husband was a Buddhist. Despite this she continued to remain a dutiful wife, though she herself followed the Jaina faith most scrupulously. One day her father-in-law commanded her to cook for the Buddhist bhikkus he had invited home, including meat which bhikkus were used to eating. Nīli couldn't disobey. But she cleverly took hold of the bhikkus' leather sandals and cooked a meal for them. The guests loved every morsel of it. When they got up to leave they found the sandals missing. In the meantime, Nīli instructed some neighbourhood children to tease the bhikkus saying they had eaten their own slippers and were looking for them. When the children did as told, it enraged

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that of Ambica.

Sāgaradatta and his father who threw Nīli out of the house, calling her an unchaste woman. Now in the same city was a gate that was shut and would not open. The king was told only the truly chaste woman of the place would be able to open the gate. Sure enough, the gate opened the moment Nīli touched it. Her husband and father-in-law, 'chastised', were ashamed to have unjustly charged her the way they did. According to A.K.Ramanujan, "the excess of rage, the power of an ordinary woman to explode into a goddess when she is given a sufficient charge of anger, seems...the underlying pattern. It is as much a theory of emotion as a theology; together they make a special recognisable genre, the folk myth of the village goddess."[177]

Now, to the story of Māriammaṉ, based on Kannada folklore (but also prevalent in parts of Tamilnadu, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh, with probably minor regional variants).[178] Once a brahmin girl was abandoned by her father for she menstruates before her father could get her married. A Lingāyat man, feeling pity for her, took her home and looked after her. One day, a Māḍiga (considered lowest of castes; to this day) man saw her and fell in love with her. He desired to marry her. His mother instructed him learn the brāhmiṇ ways if he wanted to marry her. Claiming to be a brāhmiṇ, he asked her hand in marriage. The lingāyat, believing him, married her off to him. She had two sons by the mādiga man. One day her sons found their father sewing sandals for people. They got back home and enacted what they say, playfully. Their mother, horrified, dissuaded them from doing so to which they said to her that is what their father did all day long. She was so disgusted and angry (at realising that she, a brāhmiṇ, was after all married to a mādiga cobbler) that she assumed the dreadful form of Māri

[177] A.K.Ramanujan, "Two Realms of Kannada Folklore", Stuart Blackburn and A.K.Ramanujan, eds, Another Harmony: New Essays in Folklore of India, OUP, Delhi, 1986; p. 64

and went after her husband and her children. The children took refuge in goats and buffaloes; she killed them and drank their blood. In yet another (Tamil) version, we have the woman feeding her mother-in-law and her husband cooked slippers; the mother-in-law and husband are enraged, call her unchaste, and in anger she assumes the form of Māri-ammaṉ.

If we look closely at both these tales, there are common motifs. Both the women are married to people from another social category – a Jaina to a Buddhist, a brāhmiṇ to a mādiga – on the sly. There is the idea of pollution and the wife getting her revenge for that. The motif of cooking leather slippers is common to both stories. This would be seen as the ultimate insult (as an act of vengeance) that the women, as housewives, are able to deal at those who polluted them – the husband and father-in-law, the husband and mother-in-law. In both cases (in the case of Māri, at least in the Tamil version) the women are charged as unchaste. But while the Jaina versions removes the violent 'second half' of the story and makes do with a relatively subdued resolution to the whole case, with Nīli getting to prove her chastity by opening the gates of kingdom, the Māri story has the ordinary housewife turn into a dreaded demon goddess, killing whatever came in her way, including her own children, in the bargain. [179] No doubt that the Jaina author of Ratnākaraṇṭaka Śrāvakācāra was picking up the tale from a folk layer for the story of Nīli and her marriage to the Buddhist on the sly. The name Nīli that he gave his heroine was also part of the same folk base, and surely, a popular enough name for him to name the protagonist of his tale Nīli. One must point out that the Jaina author of this text, Sāmantabhadra belonged to the 2nd century AD and hailed from Jinakāñci (near Kāñcipuram, place

[178] Ibid.

of the famous Jaina temple of Tiruparuttikuṉṟam) which is important since this is the area around which these folk tales moved. We must also note that even in the Nili stories Kāñcipuram is mentioned, showing it fell within the circulatory space of the story.

The story of the Jaina yakṣi Ambicā, and her antecedents, first appears in the Śrīpurāṇam. Incidentally, her story almost lives in the narratives of the Tamil Jaina women. After Cīvakacintāmaṇi, this is the most popular Jaina story among Tamil Jaina women. Almost invariably the one they immediately begin to narrate the moment one asks them for a 'Jaina' story. Now Ambicā was the wife of a brāhmiṇ named Somasarma from north Girinagara, who had two sons and a woman who helped about in the house. [180] One day, during a death ceremony (śrāddha) he went with his relatives for a bath in the river. In the meantime a Jaina monk passed by his house and Ambicā gave him some food. When Somasarma returned and learnt of this he was furious and called her unchaste. Extremely dejected at this she left the house and sought refuge with the Jaina mendicant in the forest, with her two children. Meanwhile, Somasarma, repentant of his action, went looking for her. When she saw him approaching them in the forest (in some versions, with a torch flame, since it was dark), afraid that he might harm her, she killed herself, leaving her children there (in some versions, he takes the children back home) and thus became a yakṣi. When the children saw her in this form they were frightened. She granted them a boon that she would assume the human form when she visited them. One day, when she is

[179] A.K. Ramanujan points out that a Kannada proverb says, "nāri muṇidare māri" – a woman, when furious, is Māri. Ramanujan, cf. cit, p.56

[180] As mentioned in Ve.Vedachalam, Iyakki Vaḻipāḍu (Tamil), Agaram Printers, Madurai, 1989; p.89; also from narratives of Tamil Jaina women in Tamilnadu. One owes the intensive reading sessions of Vedachalam, to my mother.

visiting her children thus, Somasarma asks her to show him her yakṣi form. When she does, he is so terrified that he kills himself (or simply dies). He is reborn as the lion that becomes Ambicā's vehicle. She goes on to become the protective deity of Neminātha tīrthaṅkara. Ambicā is also called Dharmadevi and incidentally she has a shrine dedicated to her in the Jaina temple at Jinakāñci (Tiruparuttikuṉṟam) and the Jainas believe this image was originally part of the Kāmākṣi temple complex at Kāñcipuram which they believe was originally a Jaina temple converted during the time of Ādi Śaṅkara. Ambicā is portrayed as one holding a mango leaf, a child and a staff. She is supposed to be a powerful deity in her own right and a giver of boons.

Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār, the Śaiva (woman) saint (whose time is between that of Appar and Gñānasampantar) has an almost similar tale. Her story is narrated in Cēkkiḻār's Periyapurāṇam [181] in Tiruniṉṟaccarukkam. She belonged to a merchant family and was called Punitavati. She was married to Paramadattaṉ, son of judge in Nāgapaṭṭiṇam. Her friends once gave him two mangoes, which he sent for her. Meanwhile, a Śaiva saint passed by their house and Punitavati gave him one of the mangoes. Paramadattaṉ came home for dinner and ate the one mango that was left. Finding it sweet he asked her for another mango. But she had given it to the saint. She was scared. But Śiva saved her by producing another mango. Paramadattaṉ found this even more delicious than the first one. He asked for another and she produced the mango by the same means. Now he was terrified as he thought she possessed supernatural / divine powers. Hence he abandoned her and married another woman. Punitavati, dejected, yearned to become a pey, went to Kailāśa and Śiva gave her the name Ammaiyār. According to Vedachalam, Ambicā's form and her story is the older of the

[181] Ve.Vedachalam, cf. cit, p.93

above two in Tamilnadu. [182]

Now in the above two stories what is interesting is that both the housewives turn into supernatural beings – a yakṣi, and a pēy[183]; in both cases the women treat / feed a person from (another) social / religious order – Punitavati, probably a Jaina (?) to a Śaiva saint, and Ambicā, a brāhmiṇ, to a Jaina monk. In both cases there is this association with divinity at some level (in case of Ambicā a divine power forces the gates shut and visits the king in the dream to say only a chaste woman can open them); in case of Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār Śiva helps produce a mango and blesses her too. In the case of Punitavati going to Kailāśa, the concept (of going to Kailāśa) is common in the viḷḷuppāṭṭu genre, in especially what Blackburn called "death stories" (usually pathos filled and violent) wherein the woman after death usually "goes to Kailāśa, receives boons from Śiva, returns to earth as a deified figure..." [184]

In all these stories (Kuṇṭalakeci included) the women marry / get married to men who are 'their kind' – different social orders, religious order, caste, etc. In Kuṇṭalakeci's case, it is a thief she consciously marries. In almost all cases the husbands accuse them of being unchaste or they 'fear' them or are awed by them in one way or the other. In the case of Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār, Ambicā and Māri (and our Nīli, too, though in different circumstances) the husbands show fear of the women's supernatural powers. In one case, the husband even

[182] Ibid, p. 97

[183] Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār refers to herself as Kāraikkāl pēy – Aruputta Tiruvantāti – "pērirava tīmaperuṅkāṭṭir pēyōṭum āralalvāy nīyatu māṅku" (the intelligent woman who dances in the forest like a fearsome pēy) Ibid, p. 92

leaves the woman to marry another, seeing her divine prowess (Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār). While Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār, Ambicā, and Māri become saint, protective deity, goddess, respectively, Kuṇṭalakeci and Nīlakeci take a different course, as preachers. Only in the case of Nīli of the Jaina story, wife of Sāgaradatta, there is no apparent shift in her status as dutiful wife, more in keeping with the main aim of the text in which she figures, meant as everyday rules for the laity, śrāvakācāra – this, last, character is 'fixed' within a this-worldly paradigm.

In highlighting these cases, one is directing attention to a basic common folk layer that these stories take from, only to assume a meaning different from what may have been originally intended. The common layer is significant. Women wronged, in some way, in their domestic lives (in all these tales at least) assuming a form above normal, almost nearing godhood, or to a state of higher existence seems to be the common larger narrative of the period. Organised religions were taking these wandering / prevalent tales (of women, as central to all these). The Śaivite tradition this gave a bhakti twist to the Punitavati story; Nīlakeci would be ordained into the proselytising mission of the Jainas; Ambicā becomes the protecting deity of Nemi tīrthankara, and so on. If there is something unresolved, however, in all these stories, it is the question, perhaps of sexuality. Which could be translated as the 'fear' element that comes along with the single-ness of these women, 'abandoned' as they are (or they abandon) by their husbands. They are thus confined to a de-sexed image, curbed and 'imprisoned', as it were, to an image of a philosopher (Nīlakeci; Kuṇṭalakeci), saint (Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār), yakṣi (Ambicā) or a pēy-goddess (Māri). In case of such women characters as Nīli, they would

[184] Mentioned in George Hart, "The Maṇikkuravan Story: from Ritual to Entertainment", in A.K.Ramanujan, Stuart Blackburn, eds, op.cit (pp.233-262); p.249

remain wanderers in a sense, on the fringes, and their dominion would be the stretch which is a no-man's land, both literally and metaphorically – between two villages or a town (pattinam) and a village and so forth.

While a lot is said and been written about purāṇic religion built around these folk incorporations and inclusions, the Jaina-folk dialogue has not been analysed adequately. At least in studies on Jainism in Tamiḻakam. The striking similarities in the motifs that operate in the story of Nīli the Jaina wife in Ratnākaraṇṭaka and that of Māri; or Ambicā and Punitavati suggesting borrowings from a common narrative / narratives. Nīli's story is part of this larger context of folklore becoming the pattern in organised religion and certain kinds of folklore travelling across the region, through journeys of re-interpretations. One would dwell a little at length on the motifs here – in different versions – and a radical recasting of Nīli in the text Nīlakeci.

The viḷḷuppāṭṭu (or bow song) version of Paḻayaṉūr Nīli, probably closest to the 'original' folklore shows the courtesan (dasi) Cantananañkai transformed into Nīli. The dāsi here is treated with utmost sympathy, as a woman wronged and murdered by Nambi, the temple priest. Interestingly this Nambi is the priest of a temple called Poṉṉūr Koil – there is incidentally, a Jaina association to Poṉṉūr (if it is the same Poṉṉūr, near Vandavāsi, in Kāñcipuram district, referred to here). Tiruvaḷḷuvar, author of the Tirukkuṟaḷ is said to have breathed his last here. Today the Tamil Jainas have built a memorial for him It is possible that this same Poṉṉūr is referred to in the viḷḷuppāṭṭu we have used, since in this story Nambi is re-born to a merchant at Kāñcipuram (not far from Poṉṉūr).

The viḷḷuppāṭṭu begins not with invocation to any other deity

but with the vil̤ḷukkārar (the bow songster) seeking 'permission' (probably of Nīli herself) to narrate the story of Nīli, story that has been narrated with fear by this storyteller (from then until date) – "*paṉṭu tōrum iṉṟu varai intapporuḷōr pēyeṉṉayk kūrum caṉṭāla nīliyeṉṉum cāmuṇḍi icakkaiyaruḷ.*" It is important that Nīli is identified with the goddess Cāmuṇṭi and also called Caṇṭāla, as also icakki (yakṣi). The association comes in a period when yakṣi worship was prevalent in Tamiḻakam. Nīli had already been deified by this time. Incidentally, yakṣi worship, according to some scholars, is a contribution of Jainism to Tamilnadu – more so because of the concept of the yakṣi as protecting deity of a tīrthaṅkara. However, it can also be seen as an incorporation of the local goddess cults into Jaina cosmogony. Of course, debate as to which happened earlier is not one's aim here.

The worship of yakṣi Ambicā – Dharumadevi is supposed to be the older of the other yakṣis propitiated in the Jaina temples in Tamilnadu, also because the tīrthankara Nēminātha has more temples (most of the older ones) dedicated to him and Ambicā is his yakṣi. Interestingly, this viḷḷuppāṭṭu is also performed in the summer months in the Icakkiyammaṉ koil at Muppandal, which incidentally, is a village in the north Arcot district, a Jaina stronghold. One may also point out that of all the yakṣis Ambicā (whose story is more popular with Tamil Jaina women, as mentioned before) seems to have had more 'violent', pathos filled antecedents / story. Speaking of Paḻayaṉūr Nīli 's story, perhaps the only attempt to analyse it as a folk tale was made in the 1960s by Hameed[185], as mentioned earlier, in this chapter. In the first place, his choice of two folk tales – quite distanced from each other in terms of themes and treatment – is problematic. Secondly, he uses a single version of Nīli story (when there were others) where Nīli is the brāhmiṇ wife of a

[185] K.P.S. Hameed, cf. cit. he takes Nīli and Kaṇṇaki.

brāhmiṇ man who kills her. Had Hameed used a similar hypothesis for the many versions of Nīli story alone, or even stories such as that of Ambicā, Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār and Māri-amman̲, there would be a more fruitful delineation of the structural pattern in these narratives; more connected and similar as they are to each other than Nīli and Kaṇṇaki are to each other – the only similarity being the husbands having an affair with a courtesan. There again, in fact, even within Nīli stories, not in all versions is the man married. For instance, in one of the viḷḷuppāṭṭu versions, there is no mention of a wife in the first place. This being so, transposing Propp's hypothesis (on Russain folklore) on to a Tamil milieu without as much as contextualising the subject does not work. The underlying historical, social reasons for the prevalence and circulation of similar streams of narratives are missing in Hameed's paper. Yet, that remains about the only work that (between 1968, when it was published, till date) which at least tries to analyse the Nīli folklore and addresses the question of structure and narratives of Tamil folklore. The interesting web of cross cutting narratives of women 'doing the rounds' in Tamil history by themselves make (ask) for a wealth of studies in popular Tamil religion and culture; many of these wanting to be explored.

One of the versions referred in one's study is an anonymous[186] Nīli Nāṭakam, as mentioned earlier. Now this version begins with what is called tuti (invocation) to various deities – Subrahmaṇya, Tirumāl, Mahālakṣmi, Paramaśivan, Pārvati, Saraswatī; and the sages, in that order. This version is one performed at the Ekāmbaranātha temple at Kāñcipuram (as it states) and is fairly more elaborate than the viḷḷuppāṭṭu version.

[186] The library copy (of Roja Muthaiah Research Library, Chennai) did not possess the first two pages, and name of author, date of the version, date of publication, etc. It was retrieved with some effort and was never accessioned before. These may be very few copies of this nāṭakam

The invocation section ends with 'maṅgalam' to "keśava madhusūdana" and "tirukacci ekāmbaranāthaṉ" and to the "vedi" (brāhmiṇs) besides Nīli (*anta paḻayaṉūril vantu paḻi vāṅkuṅ cuntarikkum*):

"maṅkalaṅkeśava matusūtanukkum...
maṅkalantirukacci yēkāmparanātarukkum
maṅkalamavariṭam vāḻpavarkkum maṅkalam
vetaṅkalaiṅanum otiyuṇartiṭum
nītamikavuṟu vetiyarkkum...
muntiyapiṟappinil nintaiyāykolaiceyta
antaṇaṉceykaiyai cintaikoṇṭē
pintiyapiṟappiṉil antapaḻayaṉūril
vantupaḻivāṅkuṅ cuntarikkum maṅkalam..."[187]

This maṅkalam sets an auspicious mood for the play / performance to begin, with all the deities invoked including Paḻayaṉūr Nīli – "to that beautiful woman who avenged in her next birth, her unfortunate death at the hands of the brāhmiṇ, at Paḻayaṉūr."

Each scene in the nāṭakam is set to a specific rāga (also mentioned) and tālam[188] and in all probability this version came into existence after the time of codification of Carṇātic music in Tamilnadu and was performed in the manner of traditional 'pārāyaṇam' or 'katā-kālakṣepam' (elaborate story recitations) – mostly in temples and in context of reciting stories from the Purāṇas, and the epics. One just makes this conjecture based on the manner in which the Nīli Nāṭakam is structured; in the absence of any background information, or edited notes on this

available is what one was told. I am grateful to my mother who sat with me reading Nīli Nāṭakam over several (sometimes interrupted) sessions.

[187] Nīli Nāṭakam; p.4 "maṅkalam"

version. Then follows prayers on the stage / performative space to Vināyaka. The nāṭakam, strangely, does not begin with invocation to Vināyaka, but to Subrahmaṇya. Vināyaka worship happens later; after the maṅkalam, as mentioned, has been sung. In the first few verses of the invocation at the beginning of this work, different aspects of Nīli and her story are invoked (recounted) as well. For instance,

"eḻupatiṉmar eri muḻkiyirakkacceyta ā ā
paḻayaṉūr nīli katai pārmitiṇāṉpāṭa
aḻakumayilērivarum arumukavaṉ tuṇaiyē jeya jeya" [189]

'Salutation and seeking guidance (tuṇai – support, being with) of the six-headed one, who rides on the beautiful peacock vehicle, (so that) I (may) sing of Paḻayaṉūr Nīli, who causes the seventy to be consumed by flames.'

This version, in keeping with the style and treatment, is elaborate and detailed, and should have been a long performance. Each character of the play is etched out in great detail and each scene is described. The entry of each character of the story is 'announced' as it were by the panegyrist (kaṭṭiyakāraṉ) with, interestingly, a 'pōṟṟi' (a verse in praise). This porri is sung to each character – even the 'villain' of the piece. The stage / performative space this is a sacred space, and each actor playing a character, of whatever bent, is by extension sacred. When the temple priest comes into picture, his (wrongful) association with the courtesan is mentioned and at the same time he is credited with due 'pōṟṟi':

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[188] Rāgas such as Kalyāṇi, Paṇtuvarāḷi, Śaṅkarābharaṇam, Etukulakāmbōdi, Puṉṉākavarāḷi, and tālams such as ādi, aṭatālam, etc are used.
[189] Nīli Nāṭakam; "Subrahmaṇya tuti" – verses 1-4; p. 1 of the library (RMRL) copy; translation of verses from Nīli Nāṭakam, wherever, mine (with help from my mother, and Winslow, LIFCO Tamil – English dictionaries)

"ayyaṉē pōṟṟi...tuyyamamaṉaiyāl taṉṉait tuyarpaṭavīṭṭilviṭṭē paiyāvalkulinta parattaiyiṉ mayaliṉviḻum vaiyakampukaḻumuṉṭaṉ malaraṭi pōṟṟi pōṟṟi"[190]

'Praise to the brāhmiṇ, who, leaving his wife at home (abandoning) fell in the snare of the courtesan (parattai) and lost his wealth, name...'

The brāhmiṇ in this version, the priest of the temple is thus shown as a married man who fell for the courtesan (the term parattai is used only in this version; in others it is dāsi) and left his wife. The wife here is killed by the brāhmiṇ (as opposed to the courtesan being killed by him in the viḷḷuppāṭṭu version) and she becomes Nīli in the next birth. And in this version she is pregnant with his child when she is murdered by him. Nīli Nāṭakam, as a genre, is meant for a complete performance and as such goes into intricate details. The play gives significant 'hints' – in the nature of a great tragedy – as to what is to follow in each character's life and there is an exaggeration in sketching of each character. For instance, the importance (to the story) of the brāhmiṇ and Nīli in the second birth is stressed on the basis of the long time they take to be born. In both cases Nīli and Nīlaṉ – the brother sister do – and the priest, these children are born in the tenth month after their mothers go through phenomenal labour pains. They seem larger than life figures, unlike in the viḷḷuppāṭṭu, which is a simple story sans embellishments and literary flourish. For instance the midwife of Paccaiyamāḷ (who will give birth to Nīli and Nīlaṉ) asks her to be patient since long period of labour pain will beget a great progeny, as in the case of Maṇḍōdari's son Indrajit, Gāndhāri's son Duryōdhana. The larger Sanskrit mythic corpus is included in this version of Nīli story – which is not the case in the

[190] Ibid, p.9

viḷḷuppāṭṭu. This version is in the genre of a full length play and places mentioned here include the Ekāmbaranātha temple of Kāñcipuram, Mayilāpur (the priest's wife hails from Mayilāpur), besides, of course, Paḻayaṉūr and Tiruvālaṅkāṭu shrine. It seems also that the Ekāmbaranāthar temple is also the performative space. The temple priest (in this version) is, in fact employed by the Ekāmbaranātha temple, unlike in the viḷḷuppāṭṭu where he is the priest of a temple at Poṉṉūr.

Nīli Nāṭakam obviously has a more brāhmiṇical slant to it, in terms of the ritualistic traditions mentioned. The parents of Nīlaṉ and Nīli on the one hand and the parents of the merchant (the priest of the previous birth) / veḷḷāḷa are advised to, and conduct, numerous yajñas and 'hōmam' to be blessed with progeny, long denied to them. These additional details are not part of the viḷḷuppāṭṭu Nīli story. Nīli and Nīlaṉ are born (in the Nīli Nāṭakam) to Sabhāpati Mudaliyār and Paccaiyammāḷ, while the brāhmiṇ priest is born in the house of the Nāgendira Ceṭṭi, and named Dinakara Ceṭṭi.

In Nīli Nāṭakam an interesting detail is the mention of the villages from where the 70 veḷḷāḷas ("eḻupatiṉmar", who threw themselves into a burning pyre to keep their word) came from. So, 60 came from Ālaṅkāṭu and 10 from Mōṭṭūr – who "protected the shrine from the outside, having locked the two – Nīli and Dinakara Ceṭṭi – inside the room." *"atokeppaṭiyeṉṟāḷ ivvitam pulampukiṉṟa ceṭṭiyārai ālaṅkāṭṭu mutaliyār aṟupatupērum mōṭṭūr mutaliyār pattupērum āka eḻupapatupēr mutalimārum..."*[191] Incidentally, Mottur (near Arani) has had Jaina settlements and to this day there are one or two Tamil Jaina families residing here, including the famed '*Cintāmaṇi*

[191] Nīli Nāṭakam, p.75 (vacanam)

nāvalar', Santhakumar[192], who is among the very few (or only) living storyteller of Cīvakacintāmaṇi (hence that title, among the many others given to him). The 70 veḷḷāḷas motif comes out in this version as well. That the Śaivite (or influenced by Śaivite tradition) versions give great importance to this story is interesting and intriguing as well. In the viḷḷuppāṭṭu version it is mentioned but not played out too much. One has already noted that perhaps the vellalas' motif got interpolated into the simple Nīli story of wrong and revenge at some point. It needs to be studied in greater detail (not in the purview of this work). It may not be highly conjectural to draw certain linkages though – that the Śaivite bard Gñānasampantar belonged to the veḷḷāḷa (social) group. The 70 veḷḷāḷas' sacrifice could be, what in another context Ramanujan refers to as "...a solemn, gory and cleansing ritual for an entire community, which feels the purgation, the terror of the victim, the raging power of the numinous goddess..."[193]

Having seen so many versions of the Nīli story, let us get back to Jaina text Nīlakeci. The significance of this text lies in the re-casting or re-imaging of Nīli – from an unfulfilled possessing spirit, a dreaded female form to that of a philosopher or debater. In so doing, the author has constructed a counter-text, a counter narrative and a counter tradition. One

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[192] One was fortunate to meet these two families of Mottur, and more importantly, Santhakumar (taatha), now around 80 years old, and I am extremely grateful to him for having directed my attention to an article in a quaint book with the article that spoke of the two gold coins released by Ellis in the 19th century, reference to which is made later in the thesis. Gold coins that portray Vaḷḷuvar, author of Kuṟaḷ as a Jaina monk. Santhakumar taatha also gave other written material, besides so much food and love. With the regret that not many want to listen to the entire Cintāmaṇi text these days. His art is crying for more audience. He recently recited the Cintāmaṇi for a project meant to bring out the same in a compact disk. One does not know what happened with the project.

[193] A.K.Ramanujan, in Ramanujan , Stuart Blackburn, op.cit, pp.71-2. Ramanujan is talking about the underlying pattern in village goddess tales, especially ones involving the concept of 'caste pollution' – as in the case of Māri leading to a "communal conflagration involving the whole village..."

perceives here the journey of a pey on the fringes moving to the centre of a text / narrative. The movement of a wandering tale towards a structured text / a treatise. Nīli's antecedents merely set the context for the creation of the text, but are not important to the text's 'existence', per se. They are used merely to highlight the idea the possibility of 'becoming'. Once Nīli has assumed the form of Nīlakeci, of her own volition (as the text states, giving her agency) after hearing the exposition of the Jaina mendicant at the Kāḷi temple, her antecedents are no longer central to the flow of the text. The text's 'being', and Nīli's 'becoming', then, are no longer mutually exclusive categories. In Nīli's becoming is the essence and raison d'être of Nīlakeci, the text, the treatise, the kāvya. And that it is a literary creation is something the author is not unhappy to admit. But Nīli and her being were most crucial to the creation of this literature. Without her there was no Nīlakeci.

There is also, in the text, a movement of a pēy to a woman of this world – a Jaina nun. If one looks at stories such as that of Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār (even here transformation from housewife to saint-poet) she is still referred to as pey of Kāraikkāl. Being a woman and a housewife, she cannot be a poet in her 'everyday' bearings. It was easier to give her that 'pēy-ness' to construct those eulogies to Śiva. A saint-poet, she would still be referred to as pēy (as in her verses too the term pey finds mention). A woman deft with words cannot but have been defined in terms of an extraordinary, or extra-normal concept. Thus also Auvvaiyyār (or one of the auvvaiyars) becomes an aged woman in her very prime by a miracle.[194] Similarly, Kāraikkāl

[194] This is what one of the legend says about Auvvaiyār, who, not wanting to get married, sought blessings of Gaṇeśa and transformed into an old woman in her youth. Few scholars in Tamil have seen this as necessarily de-sexing a creative woman, making her a saint, an old woman. A Tamil play on Auvvaiyār, *Auvvai*, written by playwright Inquilab, which showed Auvvai as a young, free spirited woman with independent thoughts, was criticised and written off by a large literary circle.

Ammaiyār, and her associations – hair let down, shedding clothes, walking on her head, etc – is also given some kind of fearful image. These women, then, who sang, or wrote, or had extraordinary qualities, are not perceived as being with the 'normal' course of affairs. They had to be 'elevated' / condemned to extra-human qualities and associations in any which way. But the Jaina story subverts this tendency, differently. In terms of 'redemption' to a subject that had long suffered being contained and restricted within either folk / popular or brahminical constructs. Nīli-Nīlakeci becomes a Jaina teacher, a person of this world, deft with words and theory. Barring a momentary 'lapse' into pēy-ness (with the bhūtavādin), or in event of flying across from one place of debate to another, in her debate she remains rooted in this world, especially in case of debate with the Vedic teacher, where she comments on caste and hierarchy.

If one has to look at the question as to why the author chose Nīli for the story perhaps the explanation should lie in the larger sphere that Nīli wandered about in. Ālaṅkāṭu, for instance. A. Chakravarti writes – "All the Tevāram singers when they refer to Ālangādu or Pazhayanur, they refer to the Amman there – Goddess as Vandārkuzhali. This seems to be an exact Tamil equivalent to the Sanskrit Nīlakeci. This probably refers to the conquest of Kāli who was probably accepted by Śiva as his won consort in the form of Vandārkuzhali. (Thus) At one time the Kāli temple of Pazhayanur must have been a very well –known place where animal sacrifices were offered to Kāli. Probably as a result of Jaina influence this Kāli temple was converted into a place of worship according to the Jaina doctrine of ahiṁsā.

Mangai (V.Padma) who played the central character, a friend, part-time colleague at Stella Maris College, Chennai always recounted this experience as one of the most interesting in her life as a theatre person.

The story of Nīlakeci evidently suggests some such reform."[195] Chakravarti suggests the Jaina influence was in place "a few centuries till the period of Śaivite revival"[196] when "this Nīli temple of Pazhayanur which was reformed by the Jaina teachers brought under the sway of Ahiṁsā dharma was taken over by the Śaivite reformers and the goddess of the place elevated to the status of Śiva's consort, still retaining the old name Nīlakeci translated into...the Dravidian...Vandarkuzhali... (Since the) place Pazhayanur is situated in Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam. Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam in the early centuries of the Christian era was entirely under the influence of the Jainas...[197] Chakravarti also notes that in the sthalamahātmya of Tiruvālangāḍu Kāli (the goddess of the shrine there) is called Nīli.[198] The author of Nīlakeci brings Nīli into this world and a this-world debate / contestations of the time. The question arises, where do we place this character, Nīli-Nīlakeci in the maze of mother goddesses (or "breast-"and "tooth-goddesses"[199]) in Tamiḻakam or in historiography that has emerged around these in Tamil history? The genesis of Nīlakeci the text and the protagonist must be seen in the larger Tamil context of worship of the goddess – or a female figure – however ambivalent in nature, such as the pēy, who also gets a shrine for herself. The 'parallel' – if we may see it thus – when it comes to the goddess tradition and Nīlakeci, lies in the fact of the centrality of the worship of the female form. The centrality of the goddess in popular Tamil culture is translated into the centrality of Nīlakeci to the text titled Nīlakeci. She is the protagonist, the philosopher, teacher, who is important to the text and its

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[195] A. Chakravarti, Nīlakeci, pp.18-19
[196] Ibid, p.19
[197] Ibid, p.19
[198] Ibid, p.13
[198] After one of Ramanujan's on southern Indian myths and folklore; on the nature of mother goddesses as benign and violent, married, virginal, and so forth.

objective. If at all there is something not quite so parallel, it is what happens to Nīlakeci the character outside the text. For, interestingly, Nīlakeci – though she may be the central figure in the text holding her own, even in assuming her 'original' form at some point in the course of the text – does not extend beyond the text itself. She does not become a popular figure among the Jaina laity (especially the female laity with an intense bond with some of the yakṣis). Nīlakeci 'breathes' within the text alone. The text, this, and its status as a literary creation, overpowers or overwhelms Nīlakeci / Nīli the character / heroine. Unlike Kaṇṇaki, who assumed a cultic status outside Cilappatikāram the text - the debate about the precedence of a Pattini cult prior to the creation of the textual Kaṇṇaki notwithstanding. One of the reasons for Nīlakeci not assuming a role / status of her own outside the text also lies in the fact that there is no 'space' for such a possibility in the already codified Jaina schemata with its components of yakṣis, tirthankaras and minor devatas. Nīli Nīlakeci is created by the author for a purpose. Nīli is the muse, if one may say so, that inspires the genesis of Nīlakeci, the text. She inspires a re-imaging and re-inventing of her popular form to suit the doctrine that gives space for (upward) movement as it were. That done, what one has for posterity, is a text and a doctrine which has indeed successfully recast a wandering, restless spirit's story into an affirmative idea / possibility.

At the social level, the viḷḷuppāṭṭu tradition continues to 'celebrate' this pathos filled story. The text Nīlakeci, then, may have certainly recast the image of Nīli the pēy, bit it has not managed to influence the popular perception of Nīli. Reasons for the same are well worth analysing though not in the immediate purview of this chapter. However, it could be said that one of the reasons for this may also lie within the Jaina community not interested in deifying this character in her

transformed Nīlakeci self. For whatever reason. What is important is also that while the Śaiva tradition and the folk tradition let the pēy form remain as it was, the Jaina version elevates her.

Moving out of the subject of recasting Nīli, there are a few other interesting angles to Nīlakeci as a text in a certain social context which one will highlight here. One of the more important sections in the text is the debate with the Vedic teacher Pūtikaṉ. The Jaina comment on the brāhmiṇical social construct based on their sacred texts is visible in this section as we have seen earlier. For the first time in the text a real social conflict is mirrored – with the entire debate on Nīlakeci being called a śūdra, and on high and low birth, etc, which one has referred to. If we extend the concept of recasting of Nīli to this section, the comment on the caste question becomes all the more important – with Nīlakeci, once a pēy and on the fringes given the agency to question the idea of high and low birth; and at another level the fact that the Vedic teacher calls her a sudra reveals the social status of Nīli (Nīlakeci). This section is also important for its longest debate on authorship of tradition, a concept which distinguishes the Jaina tradition with that of the brahminical / Vedic. That textual tradition for Jainas almost always has an author and an authorial context. Nothing is left to the sphere of ambivalence and myth-making. The genesis of the work, or the author, is always mentioned. However, there is a kind of supremacy of the text over the author, as well – inasmuch as the text highlights the fundamentals of the Jina doctrine and the author then becomes merely the instrument for achieving this larger purpose. In this sense, the brāhmiṇical tradition too, gives an overwhelming position to the text / treatise over the author. But in the case of the Vedas the primordiality of the Vedas is the quintessence. That such a text could have had a 'this-world' author would have diminished the

idea that became the basis for building a system of upholders and receptacles of the tradition, namely, the brāhmaṇas, who alone could render the primordial text meaningful to ordinary men and women of this world, through an entire paraphernalia of rites and practices.

Despite the conscious (and rather successful) recasting of Nīli, there is just one point in eth text where the power of pey comes to the fore in her debate with Piśācaka, making him believe – materialist as he is – in concepts such as pēy, and in the possibility of hallucinations. The pey as a liminal concept gets a significant inclusion here. But if one were to take the essence of Nīli Nīlakeci out of the context of the text itself, her identity prior to becoming Nīlakeci overpowers the character of Nīlakeci. In other words it is difficult for the author of the text to deny Nīlakeci her brief moment of being with her essential self – that of pēy Nīli – even if it is introduced to prove a Jaina concept. Her popular identity seems difficult to erase in this process.

Though Nīlakeci the text gives Nīli an 'emancipated' identity, yet at the same time it may be noted that it was far simpler for the author to take a character like Nīli sufficiently 'de-sexed' as she was, as a pey, an ambivalent existence. Her gendered self seems incidental to the broader / larger scheme of conceptualising Nīlakeci, the text, so far as her role in the narrative goes. But her being central to the text highlights the basic idea of Jaina thought that anyone could aspire to a 'higher' plane – as from Nīli to Nīlakeci – by following the basic tenets of Jainism.

The circulatory space of Nīli (story) is northern Tamilnadu, essentially, north Arcot, part of the Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam. This also happened to be the space of Tamil Jaina community. In

recasting a popular legend of this space and time, the Jaina author of this text wished to convey the potency of non killing and the principle of karma. At the same time however, the author also removed Nīli from her interactive aspect – with people who feared, and thence, worshipped her. The author thus both liberated and bound her at the same time, to a life of austerity and metaphysical contemplation, elevating as also desexualising her, while not deifying her. At the level of a text and a character within Tamil cultural context, here is a figure that cannot seem to fit either in the 'breast' or 'tooth' goddess; or in the village cults, the latter becoming part of the Purāṇic complex. Here is a legend, a character, that was co-opted, but into an entirely alternate scheme, the significance of it lying in interpreting a 'pēy' (pathos, fear, violence being part of it) into an affirmative one. For us, though, the movement of the story prior to its Jaina encounter is equally important in traditions such as the viḷḷuppāṭṭu and in Tevāram hymns.

Certain aspects of the story appearing in these other versions are important, such as the brāhmiṇ (priest) being re-born in a merchant family in the second birth; difference between versions (Nīli being wife of the priest in the Śaivite tradition-influenced versions, and courtesan in the viḷḷuppāṭṭu); sacrifice of the 70 veḷḷāḷas. All these aspects require further probing. In terms of a community responding to historical-social change around it (which is the prime concern of one's thesis essentially) Nīlakeci text highlights as important angle. The author takes a popular idiom to recast it. Till date, there have been no studies on this text from this kind of perspective. There is need to sift through the various layers of this text to seek newer meanings for such an attempt made in that time and space.

Why do texts and literature contain what they do, and what

could be the context, reason for the text, are questions that one has tried in a limited way to address. One notes that a text – or Nīlakeci – does not exist in a vacuum and by itself. In re-imaging a popular idiom lies the meaning of Nīlakeci within larger historical reality of change and response to change in the Tamil Jaina community. Also, the Jaina author of this text realised the need to incorporate a widely known and feared village, marginal figure and acknowledge the same, in the process of propagating the Jaina faith.

Finally, just as the deity in the dream of the author of Nīlakeci asks for her story to be committed to writing, pre-empting perhaps its affirmative tone, Nīli-Nīlakeci herself, too, desires a new narrative, a new construct, which, once rendered as this excellent kāvya, awaits a different historical interpretation.

As Nīli says in her invocation to the Jina after listening to the mendicant whom she had originally come to scare away, which may be her last word seeking that ultimate liberation:

"ñāna nanuñk koṇ ṭēnuṉ ṉarkuṇa mellām
pēytuṭan tāy piḷait tēṟkiṉi tāvor
perāyaccit tamperi yoyaru leṉṉac
ceyta tīmai keṭakkaṭa nāṭṭiṟ
cinavaṟa ṉṉeṟi yēteruṭ teṉṟuṉ"[200]

'I take refuge in you (in the Jina doctrine) desiring a break from my past deeds as pēy and my past attributes of misdeed and cruel / painful (tīmai) deeds to spread in the world the Jina thought.'

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[200] Po.Ve. So, verse.148; p.111. Translation mine – though my mother put in her intensity and seriousness in reading the text Nilakeci, as also villuppattu and Nili Natakam and explained things, I take full responsibility for the errors in translations (which are not necessarily literal), done after many more readings, in her absence.

Chapter IV

Jainas in Epigraphs and Community Narratives: Seeking Historical Continuity[1]

Tamil Jaina Community Narratives: Records of Contemporary History

A Note on the format – One of the chapters has already delved deeply into the Tamil Jaina community and the identity question. In this section, which needs to be seen in conjunction with the above mentioned chapter, one is presenting the details in a different format. All along the journey across Tamilnadu and meeting Tamil Jainas, one was struck with their sense of history and their place in it. As also with the kind of continuities, with many of the villages having a long past and the Tamil Jainas living there, in that sense, too, shared that long past through several generations. Theirs was a case of lived, shared history of their village. But again not all these histories were about the oldest of the inscriptions being found in their temple, or the oldest of the temples being found in their village. Their histories were also layered. And there were 'immediate' histories (I would use this term to signify a not-so 'ancient' past), and the usual histories of the longer time spans, and of a hoary past. And there were myths and stories that defined them. They did not define themselves through invoking a past 'recorded' in inscriptions. Their histories were about their village, its importance in the larger Tamil Jaina history, or about literature that they define also as history of the Tamil Jainas. And these histories were not necessarily reflected in the records. But where the inscriptional records made a

[1] I thank my mother whose help was invaluable in reading the Tamil inscriptions, wherever necessary, and where no translations were available.

difference, and gave them a sense of living a tradition, as it were, they invoked mention of their village in such and such an inscription. If it was found in their village or in its vicinity, all the better.

It was the need to see this continuum that urged, or 'wrote itself', this format. One will share some of their oral narratives and place the inscriptional records found at the Tamil Jaina places one visited. One is thus looking at one dimension of the past, in the community narratives, and another in the epigraphs, for each place. One will 'conclude' with some reflections on what these different sources of history say about the Tamil Jaina community's history and status in the Tamil historical tradition.

Before moving further, a point or two more about the general picture that emerged from the interactions with the community, which is related to its history. And in a sense, based on 'rootedness' and the sanction that is gained from rootedness, over a long period of time, somewhere similar, conceptually, to inscriptional records which are, again, rooted, in a place for a long period and gain (depending on where they are placed, which context they occur in) historical sanction. The only difference being, the inscriptions were committed to writing. And though interpretations vary, the writing remains, visible and tangible. While the dialogues with the community – with the Tamil Jaina community, more so – not having that advantage of 'hard' evidence, has the impending possibility of being seen as 'ahistorical'. The only point that may be made in this connection is that one needs to place the ideas of the community about their history together with other sources to reconstruct their past. And it is also meant to convey the point that not all that is written in the inscriptions reveals

the entire not-so-linear movement of history. There are several questions yet to be resolved.

Each village has its own history' its local 'sacred circulatory space' as well in terms of the sacred centres they visit. Each village perceives of itself as part of a Tamil Jaina history - as an important player as it were. Thus, within the pan – Tamil Jaina is a localised history of each village having been associated with a spectacular 'event' in Tamil Jaina history. A continuous history in most of the Tamil Jaina villages once visited – historical records from their temples, manuscripts, inscriptions in temples showing patronage from some sections of the royalty, colonial records. The missing part is the narratives of the community. A living community such as this – need to locate their history as an important part of the other histories record through sources such as inscriptions, etc. It is rare to find a long continuous lived tradition with all the records that a historian could possibly find. Yet, few community narratives are used in the process of reconstructing the history of Jainism in Tamilnadu.

Similarly each village has its own story of its association with the matha at Cittamur – the mutal mariyātai concept – variously, people of Peramandur, Vilukkam and Tayanur (the last mentioned in Thurston too) claim this mutal mariyātai. And each of these is associated with the persecution and victimisation stories of the Jainas in different periods. If one were to sieve through these different versions the common motif would be the importance of the village (within the larger Tamil Jaina history), firstly, as an important actor in the Tamil Jaina history; secondly, the persecution and their role in affirming the Tamil Jaina identity; third, the

notion of mutal mariyatai – a very Tamil, (vellala?) idiom - for gaining sanctity.

Stereotypes of Jainas

Paul Dundas in his introduction to his famous work on the Jainas begins with reference to the Sanskrit work Daśakumāracarita by Daṇḍin (about the 7th Century AD) wherein "one of its heroes encounters a naked Jain monk called Virūpaka ('ugly') who recounts – he was ruined by a courtesan to the extent of being left with only his loincloth....thus in misery and humiliation, converted to the Jain religion, abandoning clothes completely. "However, covered with dirt and filth, in agony because of ripping out my hair, suffering greatly because of hunger and thirst...and all the intense restraints imposed on me with regard to my standing, sitting, lying down and eating, as if I were an elephant...being trained for the first time, I reflected: 'I am a member of the brāhmaṇa caste. This descent into a heretical path cannot be my religion....But now, wretch I am, I have to assume a contemptible dress of nudity which is to all intents and purposes a fraud and will, through being obliged to listen to continual insults of the Hindu gods, end in hell after I die...After thinking over this unhappy choice I have made, I have come to this grove of trees and am now weeping my heart out." Dundas says – "Daṇḍin here provides the classical Hindu stereotype of Jainism as a religion practised by filthy and naked ascetics requiring pointless torture of the body...and involving as part of its doctrine the subversion of basic Hindu values." [2]

90 per cent of the Tamil Jainas come in the low income group according to the census they had gathered, which is

[2] Paul Dundas, The Jains, Series Library of Religious Beliefs and Practices, eds John Hinnells and Nimian Smart, Routledge, London, 1992, p.1

why they have been seeking reservations as a backward minority community.

Why focus on the Tamil Jaina essentially as a community? Because in writing the history of what became the overwhelming paradigm (within which communities such as that of the Tamil Jainas get marginalised) history writing is also reinforcing that overwhelming paradigm. Even when critically assessed. There is need to look at that which was not, or could never be, or was not allowed to be a paradigm worth reckoning; if it was it was soon silenced in a myriad ways – temple, patronage, bhakti, and later Carṇātic music, making for a complete picture.

But some scholars do not believe there was an identity consciousness among Jainas as distinct community for long and is a very recent development. Quoting Dumas who pointed out that "Jains often reported themselves as 'Hindu' in the early British census, and even today Jains see this question in more than one way..."[3] is not only an erroneous reading of the Jaina community in the Indian historical context (considering that the community itself arose in contraposition to the identity built of a community around the Vedas and brāhmiṇism) but also wrong historically. One has referred to the colonial records wherein the Jains returned their 'castes' as 'Jain' (as reported by Thurston) and at Jains taking recourse to legal systems to prove themselves Jain and 'non-Hindu'. Lawrence Babb in fact says in one this book that the Jains, farther south, "are found mainly in Maharashtra and Karnataka"[4] which again shows the general ignorance of a community of Jains in Tamilnadu. And of the whole history of persecution, which

[3] Lawrence Babb, Ascetics and Kings in a Jain Ritual Culture, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1998; p. 3
[4] Ibid, p.2

was so directly linked to the question of community (religious) identity.

Jaina Centres, Community Narratives and Inscriptional Histories

Before moving to the Tamil Jaina villages - with community narratives and inscriptional records as two kinds of historical sources - a brief history here about early Jainas in epigraphy in Tamiḻakam may be in place here.

Between the 2nd and 1st century BC numerous Tamil Brāhmi records have been found at various caverns, (with beds cut out), rock cut caves spread across Madurai, Pudukkottai, Tirunelveli districts of Tamilnadu. Who are the donors, and donees of these records? It is interesting that after the Brāhmi records between the 2nd and 1st century BC, the most numerous epigraphs, mostly donative, mentioning Jaina teachers, etc, occur between the 6th and 13th (also 14th) century AD in Tamilnadu.

In the early Brāhmi records many inscriptions mention the persons responsible for causing the stone beds to be made, donations to monks (most carvings, of tīrthaṅkaras, accompanied, sometimes by yakṣis, are of later periods, and not the time of these inscriptions), mention merchants, householders, etc. By and large, the inscriptions mention teachers / ācāryas, and not tīrthaṅkaras (except when invoking, at the beginning of the record). Apart from the Brāhmi records, an early inscription from the Tirunātharkuṉṟu rock (Gingee taluk, South Arcot) of the 6th century AD, records the sallēkhana (fast into death) of the acarya named Candiranandi, after 57 days of fasting. Some of the paḷḷis (Jaina monastic institutions) mentioned in the inscriptions are - Kaṇḍarāditya perumpaḷḷi (the 'big' paḷḷi)

of Neminatha at Jambai village in south Arcot district [5]; Kavirāja Perumpaḷḷi at Campukesavar temple in Trichy District [6]; Tiruveṉṉāyil Ainnuṟṟuva Perumpaḷḷi at Tirutalamaḍam temple Tanjavur district mentions a paḷḷi [7]; Ceṭikulamāṇikkapperumpaḷḷi (Sundaraperumpaḷḷi) in the inscription found at Maruttuvakuṭiśiva temple in Tanjavur district [8]; Jinagiripaḷḷi at Ānandamaṅgalam (Chingleput district). Big monasteries were also situated at Tirunarungondai (Nārpatteṉṉāyiraperumpaḷḷi), Tondur (Vaḻuvamoḻi perumpaḷḷi); Seruvakkam (Śrīkāraṇapaḷḷi); Chettipatti (Vīraśekhara perumpaḷḷi); Sadayapparai (Perunārkiḷḷi Chōḻa perumpaḷḷi); Vijayamangalam (Vīrasaṅkaṭa perumpaḷḷi).These were spread across Pudukkottai, Tinnevelly, Madurai, Ramanathapuram districts. One will trace these out on a map and analyze the position and placement of these – some connected with Jaina temples - in the context of temporal power, etc.

It may be noted that like the Śaiva and Viṣṇu temples, Jaina temples also held lands in absolute ownership (*tirunāmattukkaṇi)* and enjoyed lands made over for festivals (*tiruviḻāppuram*, *cuṅkaippuram*, etc.) and for specific services (*tirupaḷḷi eḻuchchi* – dawn waking up ritual of the deity, a very brāhmiṇical form). The 'paḷḷiccandam' lands were demarcated by stones with triple umbrella carved on them (Tirumukkuḍai Kaḷ), and occasionally, a monk's pitcher.[9]

There is a reference made to 'ainnuṟṟuva perumpaḷḷi'. In this connection, attention may be drawn to the famous

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[5] Annual report Epigraphy (henceforth ARE / AR) 448 of 1937 – 38
[6] AR 32 of 1937 – 38
[7] South Indian Inscriptions (henceforth SII), IV, no.443
[8] AR 392 of 1907
[9] K R.Venkatama Ayyar, 'South Indian Jainism, repr. T.A.S.S.I. 1957 – 58 (pp 24-36)p.28.

merchants' collective, the 'ainnuṟuvar' (*nānātēsiya tisaiyāyirattu ainuṟṟuvar*'). In this regard, "The 'five hundred' originated in Aihole in Bijapur district (Karnataka) – in 8th century AD; it was the largest organisation of itinerant merchants of the supra-regional character...The number, 'five hundred' also became conventional for the name was derived from the parental organization and remained so for the rest of their history, despite (becoming) a larger one (with) membership from various regions and communities".[10] For our purposes, a perumpaḷḷi with this name could imply perhaps the close affinity of this (wherever the name occurs) merchants' collective / guild with a monastic institution. It is possible to aver that the paḷḷi was under the collective charge of the group, the five hundred, in terms of its functions and everyday affairs, and perhaps part of the endowments for this paḷḷi came from the 'five hundred'.

Among other things the Jaina inscriptions refer to teachers, some more often mentioned than others, perhaps as a result of their popularity / eminence. They are Ajjanandi (Accananti in records), Aṣṭopavāsi, Guṇasenā, Nāganandi, Guṇavīra, and other. One inscription at Tiruppanmalai, North Arcot has the image of Nāganandi. Ariṣṭanēmi, a pupil of Paravādimalla, lived in Tiruppanmalai, where one of his pupils, the nun Pattinikkuraṭṭi opened a celebrated nunnery. One of the Tamil - Vaṭṭeḻuttu records in the reign of 'Vikramāditya' Varaguṇa Pāṇḍya records the gift of gold to the paṭṭāriyar (nun) of this place by a woman disciple of Ariṭṭanēmi, Kuṇatāṅki Kuraṭṭigaḷ; there is a record of Ajjanandi, where the sculpture was caused to be made by Varaguṇai, disciple of Pattini paṭṭāriyar of this hill; and one

[10] R. Champakalakshmi, 'Urbanisation in South India'. Presidential Address, IHC 1986. repr.p.24.

mentioning the teacher Vīranandiaṭikaḷ of Mēlaipaḷḷi monastery at Tirunaṟuṇgoṇḍai. P.B.Desai [11] dates these records between 9th and 10th century AD.

An interesting feature of the inscriptions mentioning the teachers is that teachers from two or more places (other monasteries etc.) are mentioned either as causing sculptures to be made, or merely by virtue of having been part of the 'lineage' of the teachers mentioned. It may be noted that these sites became part of the Tamil Jaina sacred 'circulatory' space. Among the teachers, Ajjanandi is mentioned in inscriptions in Melur, Periyakulam, Palani, Madura (Madurai district). Mention is made of his mother Kuṇamaṭiyār in one of these. [12] Inscriptions 61, 62, 68 of Madras Epigraphical Collection, 1910, of the Pāṇḍya country, mention Kuraṇṭi-Aṣṭopavāsi, a famous Jaina priest who had for his disciples, Kaṇakanandi, Guṇasenā, Nāganandi, Ariṭṭanemi. [13] Three generations of pupils of Kaṇakanandi are noticed in a Kiḻakkudi inscription (No 63 of Madras Epigraphical Collection) namely, Abhinandana Bhaṭāra I, Arimaṇṭala Paṭṭāra, Abhinandana Bhaṭāra II. [14]

Ajjanandi was responsible for the carving of sculptures on the rocks of hills at Vaḷḷimalai (South Arcot), Āṇaimalai, Aivarmalai, Aḻagarmalai, Karuṅgālakkuḍi, Uttamapālaiyam and at the natural cavern (Iraṭṭipoṭṭai rock) at Eruvadi in Tinnevelly district. [15] Kundakunda (1st century AD.?) founded the lineage named after him, Kundakundāṇvaya.

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[11] P.B. Desai, Jainism in South India and some Jaina Epigraphs, JSS Sangla, Sholapur, 1957pp.68-69.

[12] K.V. Subramanya Ayyar, on Buddhism and Jainism in Indian Antiquary, XL, p. 215. Reference here to no.64 of Madras Epigraphical Collection, 1910

[13] Ibid . p. 215

[14] Ibid . p. 215

[15] Annual Report on South Indian Epigraphy, 1916, p.112

Among his successors, was Umāsvāti, who compiled the philosophical treatise, Tattvārthasūtra.

Sāmantabhadra is another teacher who 'moved' in his aim to establish the Jina faith. Simhanandi, as is popularly believed, helped Koṅkuṇivarman̠ (c. 400AD) in founding the Gaṅga Kingdom. Another teacher, referred to as Tāmbūla ācārya (Śrīvardhadeva) wrote the Cūṭāmaṇi (a minor Kāvya) of 96,000 verses.[16] T.N. Ramachandran writes, "The spread of Jainism and the dissemination of Jaina ideals in the Tamil Country received sufficient impetus on the advent of Kundakundācārya; evident by a Dravidian of the first in almost all genealogies of the southern Jainas..."[17]

Early Tamil Brāhmi inscriptions[18] have been noted at – Marugaltalai (in Chevalapperi taluk, Tirunelveli district), Anaimalai, Kalugumalai, Tirupparankunram, Arattapatti, Kilavalavu, Karungalakkudi, Muttupatti (also called Samanar Malai), Kongar-puliyangulam and Alagarmalai (all in Madurai district); Sittannavasal (Tiruchirapalli District), Arachchalur (Erode Taluk, Coimbatore), Mamandur (Cheyyar Taluk, North Arcot), Tirunatharkunru (South Arcot), Pugalur (Karur Taluk, Tiruchirapalli), Tiruchirapalli golden rock and Pillayarpatti (Ramanathapuram).

Tamil Jaina inscriptions have been found (apart from the Brāhmi inscriptions) in temples dedicated to the Tīrthaṅkaras, and numerous grants to monastic institutions. The detailed analysis will be given in the chapter on inscriptions. However, they are found in Karandai, (Ceyyar Taluk, 11 inscriptions), Tirumalai (Polur taluk, about 9

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[16] K.R.Venkatarama Ayyar, op. cit, p.29.

[17] T.N. Ramachandran, Tiruparuttikun̠r̠am and its Temples, Madras 1934. p. 4

[18] One will discuss Iravatham Mahadevan's work in this connection in the course of this chapter.

inscriptions). Pañcapāṇḍavamalai (Walaja taluk – 2 inscriptions),Viḻāppākkam (Walaja taluk – 2) Vaḷḷimalai (Wandiwash –Vandavasi- taluk – 5), all from North Arcot district; Ānaimalai (Madurai Taluk – 10), Kiḻavālavu (Madurai taluk and district – 2); Tirupparuttikuṉṟam (also known as Jina-kāñci) Vardhamāna shrine has had a continuous and long period of Jaina occupation and Pallavas, Cholas and the Vijayanagar rulers have patronised this center near Kanchipuram, and the inscriptions here continue from the 12 to the 16th century AD (about 25 inscriptions); a single (significant) bilingual (Sanskrit and Tamil written in Pallava Grantha) charter on copper plate, found at Pallankoil, of Pallava Simhavarman III (9th century); Malayakkoil (Pudukottai – 50; Aivarmalai (Madurai –1); Aluruttimalai (Pudukottai) Jaina settlements referred to in the inscriptions are at Madurai, Vellarai (Tirunelveli), Tondi, Ponnai, Potalai, Nelveli, Nalliyur, Karur, Yarrur (Arrur), Pakanur, Kunrattur.[19]

Jaina settlements also existed in places such as Arpakkam, Magaral and; Aryaperumbakkam. With Śaivite religion holding sway here during the 7th / 8th centuries AD, theses two villages, which were known to be Buddhist and Jaina settlements, became dominated by the Śaiva veḷḷāḷars, also called the 'nīr-pūci nayiṉārs' by the Tamil Jainas, as one has noted in a previous chapter; temples here are known to have been converted from Jaina and Buddhist to Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava ones. While Tirupparuttikuṉṟam was the famous Jinakāñci, Burgess[20] had identified Cittamur (South Arcot) as Jinakāñci. Hieun Tsang who is said to have visited Kāñcipuram in 640 AD, described the center (Kin-Chi-Pulo) as being inhabited by Jainas and Baudhas.

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[19] I V Mahadevan, Corpus of Tamil – Brāhmi Inscriptions, pp. 4 – 12.
[20] Indian Antiquary, XXXII, p. 460

Royal patronage as well as patronage of the well-endowed commoners was not lacking for the Jaina paḷḷis as some of the inscriptions show. "The earliest allusion to paḷḷiccantam which is an endowment to a Jaina institution is to be traced in a record of the Pallava king Vijaya Kampavarmaṉ...Mārāñcaṭaiyaṉ, an early king of the Pāṇḍya family, figures in two inscriptions at Kaḻugumalai, Varaguṇan, a disciple of Pattini pattara of the Sacred Hill of the Chāraṇas, who was responsible for the carving of a Jaina image at the place, was probably a member of the Pāṇḍya royal family.....We come across references, in the Choḻa regime to villages which were inhabited by the followers of the Jaina creed and were entirely under their management like the agraharas which were owned by brāhmaṇas....The rights and privileges of these Jaina settlements were duly protected by the royal orders....Kundavai, elder sister of Rājarāja I actively contributed to the glory of the Jaina religion by erecting more than one Jaina temple in different parts of the kingdom. ..."[21]

"In the records of the Choḷa regime and also the later Pāṇḍya rulers, roughly covering the period of 9th to 13th centuries AD paḷḷiccandam grants figure frequently in a considerable number in almost all parts of the Tamil country...Besides these paḷḷiccandam grants of Jaina ownership, there were in existence other specific endowments which appear to have been the exclusive property belonging to the community of the heads of the Jaina ascetic orders (gaṇis). They were known as Gaṇimuṟṟuttu or Kaṇimuṟṟuttu and are met with in records of the Choḷa rulers." [22]

[21] P. B. Desai, op.cit, p. 78

[22] Ibid, pp.79-80 (SII Vol II, no. 4; VII, no. 205)

Feudatories of Cholas, a collateral family of the Ceras, were among others who issued grants in favour of Jaina institutions. The interesting aspect of these despite patronage from royalty – though inscriptions from later medieval times show grants made more by laity than kings and their kin – the Jaina community settlements through the time kept decreasing. In this case, do inscriptional records run a parallel 'life' of their own, disconnected with the Jaina householders? In which case, the grants are made to institutions and not to a group of Jainas (unlike a group of brāhmiṇs settled in a village), which is attested by these inscriptions any case. Which would mean that at some point the Jaina institutions' history and that of the laity, śrāvakas had both different natures of development? It may be possible to infer that since the palliccandam grants also start around 8th- 9th century AD, period post bhakti immediately following the period of persecution; and Ādi Śaṅkara establishing the śakti pīṭhas, there emerged the need, or circumstances to start Jaina institutions similar to the maṭha as it exists today. Incidentally, while the Jainas believe that after the maṭha at Tiruparuttikuṉṟam was shifted, it moved to Cittamur, in the 11th-12th century there seems to have existed a maṭha in Tirunaruṉgoṇḍai as well (in between these two periods) according to Ekambaranathan (see section on Tirunaruṉgoṇḍai in this chapter). Which would mean, that while in the social, everyday sphere, there continued, well up to the 20th century conflict and tension between the Jaina community and others, perhaps in the same time period this did not affect the Jaina institutions, which began to emerge with its own heads and pontiffs, something, as one has noted elsewhere, that Padmanabh Jaini and other scholars have

pointed out, was a later innovation and not part of the doctrinal Jainism. It might also mean that while the kings patronised the brāhmiṇical institutions more, they also made sure they showed some interest in the Jaina institutions – and limited that interest to extending favours to the institutions and establishments and worship of a god-head – perhaps the tīrthankaras began to be perceived in the nature of a god-head. At the same time, in the early medieval periods, and later, the number of donations, grants made by individuals and members of a village (ūrār) are more numerous than grants directly issued by the kings, or feudatories or chieftains. Around this period Jaina temples were also being converted. But dies it affect the pallis?

In this connection I would refer to an inscription (SII VII, No .57 and ARE 54 of 1900) on a slab in front of the Nāganātheśvara temple at Viḻāpākkam in Walajapet taluk, North Arcot district. This inscription "records a gift of revenue accruing through all taxes from the village of Viḻāpākkam by Sambuvarāyaṉ as agaraiyiḷi for distributing four shares to two deities and 58 shares to 58 brāhmaṇas. The taxes assigned were kaḍāmai, āyam, tiruppuḍiyaḍunel, poṉvaṟi, ariśikāṇam, tiruvāsal viniyokam, sandhivikkiramapoṉ, kaṭṭigakāṇikai....ēṟimīn-kāśu (from fishing in the tank), nāyanār kāṇikkai, excluding taxes on Tūkkaipaṭṭi and Piḍāripaṭṭi." (ARE 54 dates is c. 13th century AD) The inscription reads 'excluding ('nīkki') the nāyanār kāṇikkai of these two villages Tūkkapaṭṭi and Piḍāripaṭṭi (which must have been Jaina villages). These taxes concerned both dry and wetlands within the boundaries of the villages mentioned, and the phrase 'so long as the sun and moon endure'. (SII, VII, no. 57). Viḻāpākkam incidentally has an inscription dated 945 AD (in the 38th regnal year of Choḻa Parāntaka I on a slab lying in front of

the Nāganātheśvara temple which "records sinking of a well by Pattinikuraṭṭikaḷ, the female disciple of Ariṣṭanēmipaṭārar of Tiruppānmalai (i.e. Pañcapāṇḍavamalai) the preceptor of the local Jains. Mention is made that the '24 of the village' undertook to protect the endowment. Viḻāpākkam is said to be a village in Peruntimirināḍu, a sub division of Paḍavūrkōṭṭam. The '24 of the village' means probably a committee consisting of 24 people of the village. Similar term also occurs in the Kaṟuppāṉkuṉṟu (Chengleput district) inscription" in Ekambaranathan's reading.[23] But Champakalakshmi gives more details of the concept of 24. In an inscription found on the hill Kaṟuppāṉkuṉṟu natural caverns used by the Jaina ascetics in the first millennium AD, on the rock, in Tamil and Grantha (dating to the 8th century AD) mention is made of "a Jaina teacher, Vāsudeva Siddhānta-bhaṭṭāra, who caused the shrine to be made. The Jain teacher is also called the founder of the Twenty-Four, (Caturviṃṣati-sthāpaka). The Twenty-Four may refer to the twenty four tīrthankaras of the Jainas. It may also indicate that the number 24 being sacred to the Jains, was often used by them to form committees of twenty four for religious and social purposes. Such a committee is mentioned in a Choḻa inscription of 945 AD dated to the 38th regnal year of Parāntaka I, for Viḻāpākkam in the North Arcot district"[24] mentioned above.

Thus what was an earlier Jaina establishment was being settled with brāhmiṇs with shares from the revenue of the land mentioned, which does set aside the ones accruing from the Jaina lands. Moreover what was a Jaina place of importance becomes a major Śaivite (and brāhmiṇical

[23] A. Ekambaranathan, Sivaprakasam, Jaina Inscriptions in Tamilnadu, 1987, p. 291
[24] R. Champakalakshmi, "An Unnoticed Jain Cavern Near Madurāntakam", in Religion and Culture of the Jains, p.46. I thank Prof. Champakalakshmi for giving me a copy of this article

concentration) site with the Śiva temple of Nāganātheśvara being an important nucleus – the change occurs between the 10th and 13th centuries, according to the dates inferred from these inscriptions. While initially there may have been some Jaina dominance in this place towards later period it becomes a brāhminịcal centre, while setting aside the Jaina share of the land in this deal. Elsewhere, an inscription from Āvarani, Nāgapaṭṭinam taluk, Tanjavur district (Chittiralekai perumpaḷḷi) dated before 1193 AD (in the 15th year of Chōḻa Kuḷōttuṅka III) [25] "refers to this Jain establishment in the course of a land transaction in which the lands of this paḷḷi and a Śiva temple were exchanged." [26] These are subtle instances of power play that the inscriptional records reveal.

In the inscription found in Nagarcoil in the Kumari district, we find the name Koṭṭāru. This place called Koṭṭāru was a centre of prominence for Jainism from the 8th to 17th centuries AD. The old Jina paḷḷis here did not last too long. In the 27th regnal year of Rāja Rāja I (1012 AD) in an inscription from Kaṭiyampaṭṭinam we find mention of a paḷḷiccandam grant in a place called Chēramaṅgalam." [27]

Iravatham Mahadevan has noted in several places the linkages between the Jainas and the development of the Tamil-Brāhmi script. "Knowledge of writing was brought to the Tamil country as to the rest of South India, in the wake of the spread of Jainism and Buddhism in these regions. As protestant movements against Vedic Brāhmaṇical Hinduism, these faiths kept away from Sanskrit in the initial phase and conducted their missionary activities in North India in local

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[25] ARE 487 of 1922

[26] K. G. Krishnan, "Jaina Monuments in Tamilnadu", in U.P.Shah, M.A. Dhaky, eds, Aspects of Jaina Art and Architecture, Gujarat State Committee for Celebrations fo the 2500th Anniversary of Bhagavan Mahavira Nirvana, 1975, p. 103

[27] A. Ekambaranathan, Kalveṭṭil Śamaṇam (Tamil), Jain Youth Forum, Madras, 1979, p. 75

Prakrit dialects. The monks followed the same tradition in the Tamil country, learning the local language and, in the process, adapting the Brāhmi script to its needs. They had neither any vested interest in maintaining the oral traditions, nor any bias against writing down their scriptures in the local language. As a result...the Jaina scholars (and to a lesser extent, the Buddhist scholars) made rich contribution to the development of Tamil literature during the Cañkam age and for centuries thereafter..."[28]

In this context, one may again place the identity of the Tamil Jaina community with only Tamil, as a language; and the community traces its antiquity in terms of Tamil and the Brāhmi script, and in that sense the importance of the Tamil Brāhmi records which the Tamil Jainas seem to keep a track of, following closely every it of news associated to these records. The inscriptions of the rock-cut caves and natural caverns are somewhere more important to the community in establishing its antiquity and identity related to the language Tamil which is their 'tāi-moḻi' (mother language); and the temple inscriptions only figure in their narratives when it comes to establishing the nature of 'big-time' support for their doctrine and subsequent changes therein. And it is also true that most of the ancient sites of the Brāhmi inscriptions and places around these are not settled by the Tamil Jainas now. In that sense there is a deep sense of having been forcibly 'de-linked' from their antiquity in Tamil history, which is as much their deep sense of feeling persecuted as it is a fact of history that they were, and had to move out to areas in south and North Arcot and other districts in early medieval and later periods. The de-linking is from the past

[28] Iravatham Mahadevan, Early Tamil Epigraphy, From Earliest Times to the Sixth Century AD, Cre-A, and Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies, Harvard University, USA, 2003, p. 163,

of the Tamil Brāhmi records of their past glory and popularity to an existence of relative oblivion in later periods, and the present. And a 'de-link' also from the tradition of the monks and nuns that were an important component of Jaina society.

Another point needs to be mentioned regarding the donations – a point that has been referred to regarding some of the early / medieval periods. That in many cases, in most cases, grants, donations, etc were being made by individuals or a community and not always the royalty. In later records the format of identifying a king's regnal year in which the record was inscribed becomes important to gain sanction of the ruling system, perhaps. But those who use these inscriptional sources more often than not attach more importance to the regnal year of the king (which is important) to the exclusion, almost to the context of those making the grant – of money or land, or sheep, and so forth.

Many merchants, for instance, were donors of the early cave dwellings of the Jaina monks / nuns. "Merchants trading in various commodities figure as donors in the inscriptions at Alagarmalai (ca. 1st century BC) and Pugalūr (rock-cut caves, for Jaina monks / nuns)."[29]

The Agrarian Element

Earlier inscriptions also reveal the 'agrarian' element of the Jainas – to show that even from the earliest times Jainism had its agrarian base as support came from the agriculturists (the vellalas in most cases) of Tamilakam who were the Jaina laity. Thus, "An inscription from Varichiyur (ca. 2nd century BC) refers to the endowment of *nūru kala nel* - hundred

[29] Mahadevan, op.cit, p. 141

kalam of paddy. Unfortunately the inscription is badly damaged and virtually no other information is available. It appears, however, that the endowment of paddy was for the maintenance of the large monastic establishment in this cave shelter having numerous stone beds. The phrase 'nūṟu kala neḷ' occurring in such as early inscription is interesting. The standard rate of land tax was one hundred kalams of paddy per veli (about 2.67 hectares) of wet land in the delta region of the Choḷa country during the reign of Rājarāja I. The endowment of one hundred kalams of paddy in the present inscription meant in effect that the tax on one veli of land was made over to the paḷḷi...."[30]

Again "An inscription at Aḻagarmalai (1st century BC) mentions a koḻuvaṇikaṉ 'trader in ploughshares'. The term koḻu refers to the hard iron tip fixed to the wooden plough, which has survived with little change up to the present day. (And) a short Early Vaṭṭeḻuttu inscription from Ereṭṭimalai (ca 5th century BC) is engraved on a smooth shoe-shaped granite stone. The inscription describes the function of the device as a 'stone (stopper) fitted in the vent of sluice'. While inscriptions on stone outlets (tumpu) to regulate water supply from irrigation sources are common, the present inscription occurs uniquely no the stone stopper used to regulate the flow of water."[31] Thus there was a very agrarian character to the Tamil Jaina inscriptions (since the early times, with inscriptions of later periods also mentioning terms from the agrarian context) which shows an agrarian community forming the larger popular base of Jainism (unlike what was generally believed that the Jains came from the mercantile and trading classes alone) even as few

[30] Ibid, p.140.
[31] Ibid, p.140

merchant guilds supported the Jaina faith and were Jainas themselves.

Tamil Brāhmī Inscriptions

According to Mahadevan, the early Tamil Brāhmī period dates between and century BC to 1st century AD, the Late Tamil Brāhmī period between 2nd century and 4th centuries AD and the Early Vaṭṭeḻuttu period between 5th and 6th centuries AD.[32] In each of these periods there is the presence of Jainas in the inscriptions. Moreover, "The Tamil Brāhmī cave inscriptions, now known to be the earliest Jaina records in South India prove indirect corroboration of two key elements of the (Bhadrabāhu movement to the south) legend. The palaeography of the cave inscriptions is consistent with borrowing from Magadha in ca. 3rd century BC during the Mauryan age. The decipherment of the inscriptions has also revealed early links with Karnataka and Old Kannada indicative of the proximate source of Jainism in the Tamil country....Out of the 30 sites with 89 Tamil Brāhmī cave inscriptions (included in the corpus) 28 sites with 84 inscriptions are Jaina and the remaining 2 sites with 5 inscriptions are secular, that is, having no apparent religious significance.(But with Vaṭṭeḻuttu script) out of 12 sites, with 21 inscriptions, only 4 sites with 12 inscriptions are Jaina..."[33]

Elsewhere, Mahadevan makes a very significant point. "The expression kaṇi 'a senior Jain monk' the head of a gaṇa, occurs four times in Māṅgulam (ca.2nd century BC) and twice at Aḻagarmalai (ca. 1st century BC). While many terms like ācārya, etc are common to the Brāhmiṇical, Buddhists and Jain religions, the expression gaṇin is peculiar to Jaina

[32] Ibid, p.95
[33] Ibid, p.128

hierarchy. Thus the occurrence of this term in Early Tamil Brāhmi inscriptions is conclusive evidence of the occupation of the caves by monks of the Jaina faith. We learn from the Māñgulam inscriptions that Kaṇi Nanta śrī (Gaṇi Nanda-śrī) was the senior Jaina monk who received the endowments of three hermitages from the kinsmen, vassals or officers of Netuñceḻiyaṉ, the reigning Pāṇṭiya king. The inscriptions bear testimony to the support that the Jaina faith received from the Pāṇṭiya king, his court and the local merchant guild at this early period. The given name of clan name of the senior Jain monk was Kuvaṉ, revealing his Tamil origin. This is a significant fact. For if a native ascetic could have risen in the Jaina monastic hierarchy to occupy the position of a gaṇi (head of a gaṇa) at this time, then Jainism must have taken root in the Tamil country much earlier, that is not later than the earlier half of the 3rd century BC." [34]

A sociological factor about Jainas that Tamil Jainas point out, is that monks and nuns (tuṟavar) cannot and do not exist without the illarattār (householders / śrāvakas) and thence, the fact that recorded history of these caves itself puts the date to 2nd or 3rd century BC (as above stated), there must have existed the community even earlier, in order that these caves were caused to be cut for the ascetics. An established order of laity is essential to bother Buddhist and Jaina concept of the sangha / gaṇa. A point that needs to be noted, since normal tendency has been to assign the date of Jaina entry into Tamiḻakam either through the now disproved legend of Bhadrabāhu and the retinue of monks entering Karnataka and thereafter moving into the Tamil region – which Mahadevan also refutes, as has been noted – of to assign the existence of Jaina community in Tamiḻakam form

[34] Ibid, p.129. Emphasis mine

the date of the first Brāhmi inscription in connection with Jainism.

Further, "The expression upacan at Tiruvadavur and its variant form upaca-an̲ at Kīl̲avalavu and Koṅgarpuḷiyaṅkulam dated to ca. 2nd century BC are derived from Sanskrit upādhyāya 'spiritual teacher' through Prākrit upājhāya....The upadhyaya is venerated as one of the Pañca-parameṣṭhin (along with Arhat, Siddha, Ācārya and Muṇi) by the Jainas. In the Tamil Jaina tradition, the upādhyāya is a lay teacher of scriptures. He functions as the priest in the local Jaina temple and also conducts religious ceremonies in Jaina households. In course of time, with the waning of Jaina influence in the Tamil country, the Uvaccar became priests in the shrines of piṭāri and other village goddesses. Still later, they figure as temple-drummers, dance masters and musicians in medieval inscriptions."[35]

According to Mahadevan, "The palaeographic evidence indicates that Jainism must have arrived in the Pāṇṭiya country not later than the 3rd century BC. The new faith received active support from the Pāṇṭiya dynasty and the local merchant communities as indicated by the inscriptions at Māṅgulam (ca.2nd century BC) and Al̲agarmalai (ca. 1st century BC)." Mahadevan does not deny Karnataka as being a possible route for Jainism to have entered Tamilnadu, "It is also likely that the Tamil Brāhmi script was adapted from the Mauryan Brāhmi in the Jaina monasteries (paḷḷi) of the Madurai region some time before the end of the 3rd century BC as the earliest cave inscriptions are dated to about the beginning of the 2nd century BC. It appears from the absence of reference to sects that the early lithic records in the

[35] Ibid, p.130

Tamil caves belong to the period before the schism between the Digambara and Śvetāmbara sects. <u>It is arguable from palaeographic evidence that the Early Tamil Brāhmi cave inscriptions are the earliest lithic records of the Jaina faith in India, as the Māṅgulam inscriptions of the time of Neṭuñceḻiyan appear to be earlier than the Jaina Prākrit inscriptions at Mathura and those of Khāravela of Kaliṅga.</u>"[36]

In the "Middle period – ca. 1st to 3rd centuries AD), notes Mahadevan, "There is a sharp fall of cave inscriptions in this period. The centre of Jainism in the Tamil country appears to have shifted from the Pāṇṭiya to Cēra region in the early centuries AD and the equally sharp rise in their number in the Cera country during this period...The earliest literary evidence of Jainism in the Tamil country belongs to this period, e.g, unnamaiyin uyankiya maruṅkin aṭa-p-paṭivattu āṉṟor pōla, 'like the (Jaina) monks whose bodies are emaciated by fasting and not bathed'. (Akanānūṟu 123). There is also literary evidence from Caṅkam poems that Jaina monasteries (paḷḷi) existed in cities like Kāveripūmpaṭṭinam and Madurai even during the early centuries AD." [37]

In the "Later Period – 4th to 6th centuries AD) – the era of natural cave shelters came to an end...The Early Vaṭṭeḻuttu inscriptions at Sittannavāsal – B and Tiruchirāpaḷḷi – B (ca. 5th century AD) are the last of the Jaina case shelters in the earlier traditions. A new type of Jaina monuments appears in the Tamil country in the 6th century AD in the form of the nicītikai inscriptions at Paraiyaṉpaṭṭu and Tirunātharkuṉṟu. These are epigraphs engraved on the bare summit at boulders

[36] Ibid, p.135. Emphasis mine

[37] Ibid, p.135

commemorating the places where Jaina ascetics fasted unto death....(These) represent a fresh wave of influence from Karnataka, though contacts between the Tamil and Kannada Jaina communities existed even earlier in this period...."[38]

"The earliest epigraphic evidence for the construction of temples and monasteries in brick and mortar is found in the Pulankurichi inscription of king Ceṉṟaṉ Kuṟṟaṉ (ca. 500 AD). There is now a general consensus that he was a Kalabhrā ruler as the name Kuṟṟaṉ does not occur in the Pāṇṭiya dynasty..."[39]

Mahadevan notes a period of "re-occupation" of some of the Jaina caves later between 8th and 10th centuries AD. He points out, "Jainism declined steeply in Tamil country from about the end of the 6th century AD when there was a tremendous upsurge of the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava sects revitalised by the Bhakti movement led by the Nāyaṉmārs and Āḻvārs. The Tamil Jainas were persecuted during this period. However, the persecution, uncharacteristic of Indian polity, did not last too long and the rulers resumed grants to the Jaina monasteries (paḷḷi) from about the end of the 8th century AD as attested by epigraphical evidence from the Pallava and Pāṇṭiya regions. It was during this period of revival that many of the earlier cave shelters with stone beds and Tamil Brāhmī and / or Early Vaṭṭeḻuttu inscriptions were re-occupied by the Jainas who marked their renewed presence with relief sculptures and inscriptions in the Vaṭṭeḻuttu script of the period." Among the sites that were reoccupied were Aḻagarmalai, Āṉaimalai,

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[38] Ibid, pp.135-136
[39] Ibid, p.136

Arittapatti...Sittanavāsal, Tirunātharkunru, Tirupparankunram, etc"[40]

However one point needs to be made here (besides being circumspect about the point Mahadevan makes about persecution being 'uncharacteristic of 'Indian polity' in a general sense). That merely inscriptional evidence may not be sufficient to attest to the decline and "revival" – it is looking at the contestation from a limited angle. On the question of re-occupation of cave sites he mentions, the interesting fact is that Tamil Jaina laity by this period is found in places other than these cave sites. Alagarmalai, for instance, Sittannavāsal, etc do not show any evidence of the presence of a large Jaina population (as they say these were Jaina settlements) in this period and instead there are more inscriptions from northern Tamilnadu and even Tamil Jaina settlements in these areas in this period. Barring, of course, Tirunātharkunru which was close to Cenji and had a substantial Jaina population around it.

Mahadevan continues – "there was a marked revival of Jainism led by illustrious monks like Accananti. Among these sites the most famous was at Kuranti Kātāmpalli of which no trace remains at present[41]...Other Jaina centres that came in this period include those at Śamanarmalai, Settipodavu and Pēccipallam in the Madurai region, Kalugumalai (Tirunelveli), Tirumalai (North Arcot district) and Vedāl. Śamanamalai in the Pāntiya region in the south and Jina Kānci (near Kancipuram) in the Pallava region in the north flourished as great centres of Jaina learning till

[40] Ibid, p.137

[41] Ibid, p.139. It was an important palli of 7th - 8th century AD, in the time of the Pāndyan ruler Mārañcadaiyan. This palli later became the site of a Śiva temple called the Kālanāth temple. See Ve. Vedachalam, "Kuranti Tirukāttāmpalli", in Jeevabandhu T. S. Sripal Avarkalin Nūrrāntu Vilā Ninaivu Malar (1900-2000), Tamil Samanarkal Sangam, Madurai, 2000; p. 149

about the end of 12th century AD after which Jainism went into a steady decline in the Tamil country." [42]

And this is where one chooses to differ, in the terminology and concept of decline about which much has been said. But one more point may be made here as well – that instead of decline (which suggests a downward spiral - into an 'unknown sphere', so to speak) there is need to note the survivals and that too, with negotiations and compromises that the community living in places not mentioned above, have made. Which again, cannot be seen in the kind of inscriptional records alone, since these are, by themselves, a limited medium, considering the classes (rulers, the landed, rich merchants) that issued these grants.. And they had a context, and reasons to do so. What happens between these two phases – 'decline' and 'revival' is equally important. If one considers the literary output of the Jainas in this period. Mahadevan himself points out the "enormous contribution made by the Jainas to the growth of Tamil literature from the earliest times up to about the 16th century AD...(and to) the development of a script for the language leading to literacy and the later efflorescence of Cañkam literature in early centuries AD." [43]

Would the concept of decline thus, be in exclusion to expressions of a community and its history? There is perhaps need / space for a study evaluating the very concept of 'decline' setting in context a comparative analysis of Jaina engagement with Tamil language and literature as against epigraphical evidence in the same centuries might be something for scholars to look into.

[42] Ibid, p.139
[43] Ibid, p.139

Tamil Jaina villages and Centres of Historical antiquity

The community still largely lives in villages - agrarian, many of them small and marginal farmers (few landless), semi literate largely (although the religion itself is based on a strong textual tradition and insistence on learning and some element of self study of the scriptures). The field visit itself started with Tiruparuttikuṉṟam meeting with an arcaka's family - father and son. It ended there, the first time (to gather some more funds to make it another time to other villages) and it strangely ended there as well, like coming a full circle, the second time, after one had visited a substantial number of Jaina settlements in various villages.

The significance of the Tamil Jaina village in the Jaina sacred circulatory historical space is important to understand. Either the village has a role to play in moments when they asserted their Jaina identity or importance in terms of the acaryas that came visiting. There is no divinity associated with the village. But there is strong sense of defining the village's space in the community history, the lived history. Pilgrimages too, are defined interestingly. For one, there is the local sacred sphere for each village - a different circulatory sphere, villagers of Peramandur visiting such as such shrine - and there is the pan Jaina pilgrimage - visiting the Jaina sacred centres all over India, for instance. Which is done in groups, with guided tours each year. The Tamil Jainas consider both these important.

About ritual aspects - there was a perceptible 'sensual' relating to the yaksi, the mother goddess figure within the ritual complex. But not just with the mother goddess. Accompanying a woman from Haryana - a pilgrim - helping her climb the steps at Chandragiri, the small hillock opposite the one with the Gommaṭa monolith on Vindhyagiri,

one could see the intensity of her emotion on seeing the statue. The idea of god-head and temple ritualism itself has had an interesting evolution through history of Jainism in India as a whole. And the debates within the community on these continue to this day. In this case, then, as James Laidlaw remarks "much religious practice takes place in the absence of a theory to explain it.... (or when he says why not start the enquiry so as to) declare popular practice, rather than doctrine, to be authentic 'real Jainism'"[44]

But the point again is, can one draw a distinct line between popular practice and doctrine, either? One has noted this complex attribute – for there were times when 'popular demand' influenced the doctrine and in medieval times the texts were constructed to accommodate and create new attributes within Jainism. Thus doctrine, itself, does not remain a fossilised entity, unchanging over centuries. Either in Jainism or Buddhism – barring the basic tenets that both religions insist on, rituals and popular practices are introduced, reformulated, consistently.

How the Jains perceive themselves and their past is important to this study – to understand the identities in conflict. That the Tamil Jainas have been asserting an identity through different periods in history, continuously is by itself an interesting phenomenon to study. And that they have been building their identity vis-à-vis the other through different periods as well. Against the brāhmaṇas, against the Buddhists, against the Śaivite and Vaiṣṇavite religion and community through the bhakti process, against a Muslim ruler or a low caste ruler wanting one of the women of their community to marry – the list is endless. The common

[44] James Laidlaw, Riches and Renunciation: Religion, Economy and Society Among Jains, Clarendon Press Oxford, 1995; pp.9-10

undercurrent is the continuous effort to assert and affirm a community identity against the overwhelming paradigm of the time. Against the hegemony of the period, as it were. And this, what follows is one way of looking at the past with the community.

Kancipuram, Tiruparuttikunram

I started the journey into Tamil Jaina 'country' with Tiruparuttikuṉṟam (also called Jinakāñchi, had the Jaina matha here which shifted around 11-12th century, to Cittamur. This place has the temple built in Pallava times, has excellent paintings on ceilings.

Parsvanathan, son of temple priest here (only two families of Tamil Jainas now residing there while the rest are from other communities. At one point this place had many Jaina families. There is a belief that the tree inside the temple complex is auspicious and is called Dharumagora. It is believed that under this tree 4 great acaryas meditated – Vāmanācārya, Chadrakīrti, Puṣpasenācārya and Mallisenācārya.

I also met the family of a former DMK [45] councillor, Agastiappa Nayinar[46], Sentamarai Ammal and their daughter Nilakeci.

"A regular colony of Jains seems to have settled in Kāñcipuram from ancient times and the locality where they lived was styled Jina Kāñci – that part of Kāñci occupied by the Jains. In Kāñcipuram taluk, Jaina vestiges are found at

[45] Dirāviḍa Muṉṉētra Kazhagam, one of the political parties (currently ruling) of Tamilnadu. Its leader, Mu. Karunanidhi has written on Jaina contribution to Tamil literature.
[46] Now no more. He gave me a number of articles and books as 'aṉbu-kāṇippu' (fond gift) and wanted to see my thesis when ready. Unfortunately that has not happened. His daughter Neelakesi is one of the ardent admirers of T. S. Sripal, who inspired her, she says, to take up Tamil literature. She has produced many articles and writings on Tamil (Jaina, and other) literature.

Tiruparuttikunram, Ārpākkam, Māgaral, Āryaperumbākkam, etc. The Tiruparuttikunram temple here...biggest in the taluk..."[47]

Pallavas ruled here from 2nd century to 9th century AD. Chālukyas, and Rāshṭrakūṭas followed; with Cholas in the last quarter of the 9th century AD, till the 13th century AD, followed by Kākatiyas, and others. Between the 14th and 17th century AD, Vijayanagara rulers held sway here. Some of the Pallava kings of Kāñci, chief among whom was Mahendravarman I (600 – 630 AD), a few Pandya , Western Chālukya, Gaṅga, Rāshtrakūṭa....Hoysala kings were staunch Jaina. ...According to tradition Mahendravarman later converted to Śaivism, by Appar, himself a Jaina earlier, when he was called Dharmasenā....The early faith of Kūn Pāṇḍya, or Neḍumāran, a great Pāṇḍya king (8th century) was Jainism, from the "clutches" of which, it is said, he was (removed) by Tirujñāna Sambandar..."[48]

"Pallānkoil cupper plates record the grant of land to Vajranandi, senior Jaina monk at Amancerkkai in Parutti-k-kunril (modern Tiruparuttikunram). The grant was issued in the sixth regnal year (ca. 546 AD) of Simhavarman. The inscription contains the earliest reference to palliccantam grant of tax free land to Jaina monasteries. However, the Pallānkoil copper plates ...appear to be a copy made toward the end of the 7th century AD."[49]

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[47] T.N.Ramachandran, "Tiruparuttikunram and its Temples", Bulletin of the Madras Government Museum, New Series, General Section, Vol. I, Pt.3, Government Press, Madras, 1934; p. 1

[48] Ibid, p.5

[49] Iravatham Mahadevan, op.cit, p. 137

"The older of the two temples is a small shrine dedicated to Chandraprabhā, the 8th tīrthaṅkara. The other, which is later, is larger...dedicated to Vardhamāna, the 24th...locally (known as) Trailokyanātha." [50]

An inscription on the west wall of the Śānti maṇḍapa in the Vardhamāna temple here [51] records tax free gift to the Nāyanār and Āḻvār, i.e., the god at Tiruparuttikuṉṟam, also called Sempōrkuṉṟu, i.e., the "Golden hill" of the village of Kaṇṇipākkam, in Vīrpeḍu nāḍu (district) of Kaḷiyūrkōṭṭam (territorial division) by its liberal owner Vīmaraiser (Bhīma) during the 18th regnal year of Rājarāja III. (1234 AD)." The engraver of this inscription indulges in cutting a joke at the expense of Vīma (Bhīma) the donor. He characterises the village given as one that donor could not by any means dispose of in sale, as it was so barren. Then the idea appears to have struck the donor that God should be willing to take it if none else were prepared to receive it, for the reason that He was its creator and as such was also responsible for its barrenness. He solemnly made a gift of the village to the God at Tiruparuttikuṉṟam and got the said record engraved on the west wall of the Śānti maṇṭapa, an action which appears to have provoked for its absurdity even the very engraver of the said record so that the latter flings an ironical hit at the donor by calling him "the ocean in charity" and suggest by side his here and there like "neḍu naḷ sellāde kiḍanḍa viḍanai" that the temple might well have been spared this gift."

Jokes apart, it may be significant to see a point in giving a donation of a village that did not produce much, or was

[50] T.N.Ramachandran, above cited, p.10

[51] Ibid, pp.49-50 and; SII, Vol IV, No.367, p. 105

barren? The donor, however, 'Jaina brāhmaṇ', according to Ramachandran but one cannot be sure as to how he drew that conclusion.

Another inscription records a tax free gift of 20 veli of land in village Ambi, in the territorial division of Eyiṟkōṭṭam, to the temple during the 21st regnal year of Tribhuvanachakravartin Kuḷōttuṅga Choḻa dēva III. The gift arose in this manner, the headman of the village called Māṇḍiyaṉ (or māṇḍiyaṉ was name of the headman himself) who was in service of Kuḷōttuṅga Chōḻa, i.e. Kuḷōttuṅga himself requested the authorities to give 20 velis of land to temple (also) because there lived his preceptor Chandrakīrti, who was conferred the title of preceptor, or Ācārya of Kōṭṭaiyūr.[52]

On lintels of three shrines in Trikūṭa basti, in 45th regnal year of Kuḷōttuṅga Choḻan is recorded sale of Hastinivāraṇa Chaturvēdimaṅgalam Mahāsabhā to the Rishi Samudāya of Tiruparuttikuṉṟam of 3000 kuṭis of land for irrigation purposes and payment of 15 mathurāntakam-madai to the same samudaya in return for the privilege of using the spring water on the river bed of Tiruparuttikuṉṟam by cutting a channel and running the spring water into it.

The inscriptions in Tiruparuttikuṉṟam occur in a succession in the years 1131, 1135, 1199, 1200, 1234, 1236, 13th century, 1362, 1387-88, 1517 and 1518 AD in the times of the Pallava, Choḻa and Vijayanagara rulers.

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[52] Ibid, p.51; and SII, no 366, Vol IV, p.104

Melcittamur[53] (near Cenji), Villupuram (South Arcot) district

Community Narratives

At present there are around a 150 Tamil Jainas living here. "Chittamur is the headquarter of the Digambara Jain community in this region. Its matha has been presided over by a succession of pontiffs from the 16th century to the modern period... (Dilli Kollāpura Jinakāñci Penugoṇḍa Chaturtha Siddha Simhāsana Tisvararahiya Lakṣmīsena Bhaṭṭāraka Bhaṭṭāchārya....mentioned in the inscription of 1951 at the renovated Parsvanatha temple there)."[54]

I stayed with the family of Samudra Vijayan (called "President vīṭu" – his wife, Rani, was the panchayat president then), the old and interesting 'paati' (Samudra Vijayan's mother) Gandharvai and Priya. The Maṭhātipati Lakshmi Sena Bhattaraka Bhattacharya avarkaḷ and the retired teacher Sukumara Panditar, besides Sundari, were people who spent time with me, introducing me to people in the village and organising them some times to gather at one place to tell me their stories.

At Melcittamur one learnt that Naccinārkiṇiyar's commentary on Cīvakacintāmaṇi was not approved by the Cittāmūr maṭham, when it was sent for cross checking. And it was sent back to him and he had to re-write the same (according to Sukumara Panditar). This of course is part of the folklore of the village in order to gain sanction as an ancient and important Jaina centre, which it was. But this

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[53] The demographic and other details of each of these Tamil Jaina settlements is appended at the end of the dissertation.

[54] A. Ekambaranatahan, Jainism in Tamilnadu: Art and Architecture, Jain Humanitarian Press, 1996, pp. 23-24

point could not be corroborated from records, or other works on Cittamur.

Women[55] sitting one night together outside the matham told me a couple of stories. One of them was the story of Ṛṣabha tīrthaṅkara, created *eḻuttu* (writing / literature) and *en* (Arithmetic). Hence since that time, Jainas have been educated (enough to read their own scriptures, in this case, in Tamil). In the Jaina tradition education is given importance.

'Our religion is an old one. It has been these since centuries' is what most of the Tamil Jainas say. And then they narrate the story of Bharata. Bharata Chakravarti (Ṛṣabha's son) divided the communities into two - brāhmaṇa maṭam and Jaina matam. How did he do it? On āvaṇi aviṭṭam tithi (falls in the month of August-September), he took some *eṟukam pū* (Calontropis gigantea)[56] and said whosever stamps on these flowers and walks by would be brāhmaṇas and the others Jainas. We have heard these stories told by our grandparents. Other religions came from Jainism, after 3rd century BC.

This koḷgai (practice) is very difficult; we cannot hurt any living being.

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[55] Discussions happened in groups of 10, 15 or at times more than 30 (in Vandavasi it was a huge gathering since it was a Friday and they had assembled at the Jinalayam in Vandavasi town, a new one, for the evening prayer – a concept relatively modern) people in most of the villages. Individual names in most cases have not been mentioned. In some cases, they were not particular their names need be mentioned as they believed they represented the thoughts of the Jaina community as a whole. Where possible, one has included personal names.

[56] "A coarse milky shrub, the charcoal of which is used in making gun-powder"; "eṟukkamaḷar – root...employed medicinally for various purposes", M. Winslow, A Comprehensive Tamil and English Dictionary..., Asian Education Services reprint, 2004 (originally published by P.R. Hunt, Madras, 1862), p.178

Observances – practice

We cannot eat butter – but younger people eat. Older ones still do not eat curds, green leaves, tubers. Others observe fasts (on those days they observe al these strictures). This is because we cannot be so strict everyday. In the months of Āḍi (July-August), Āvaṇi (August-September), Kārttikai (November-December), Puraṭṭāci (September-October), Aippaci (October-November) we observe Āṣṭānikam. Ādi Bhagavan̲ (Ṛṣabha) commanded us (our community) to practise agriculture; and for women (their duty) is observing fasts. Around 30 – 40 years ago we didn't use chemicals in agriculture for very long, even after others did. We used puṇṇāku (betel leaf), vēr̲kaḍalai (groundnuts) and mixtures like these. Times have changed. There are more pests now, hence we have to use chemicals; we have no other go. This is our profession. So we go to the temple and ask for forgiveness.

The youth say they do not see difference between religions. 'We respect other religions. We give camphor and rice offerings for other religious festivals in the same village'.

Memories of Persecution

They remember more recent incidents. Nirmala Sagar, a *nirvāṇam* (nude, digambara) muni came here around 25 years ago; now he's at Urjayantagiri. They took him to Tiruchi (the Muslims) forcefully. It was during Indira Gandhi's time. Jainas brought a letter from the Government (to protect our munis when they come). They had thrown stones at him. Hindus have also tried to wipe away Jainism. Jinakanchi maṭha was at Kancipuram and had to be shifted here to Cittamur, because of Hindu dominance. This street had brahmins before Jainas came here. When Shanti Sagara started work on this temple. There was a Perumāḷ temple

here before. Santisagara muni started work on this Cittamur temple. There used to be in this place a small perumal koil – where we have the bigger (Pārśvanātha) temple today. Since then this village became a śamaṇa. They brought a stone from Tindivanam for the mūlasthāna vigraham (deity in the sanctum sanctorum) and then gradually built the temple.

A different version of theirs says that the maṭham here was established to protect Jaina agamas from the Buddhists around 10th – 11th century Santisagara muni started the temple here. (of course, this has no corroboration, as one shall note subsequently).

In our religion we do not ask for material things; only for our desires to be controlled and to gain mukti. Non killing is our main tenet.

First we are Jainas, then Tamil. We were told we came from Śravanabeḷagoḷa. Nīr pūci nayiṉārs are like us. We were the sandal paste on our foreheads. During Śaiva Vaiṣṇava times the nīr pūci nayiṉārs originated. They killed several Jainas, so those who converted to Śaiva religion we call them nīr pūci nayiṉārs. . 8000 Jaina muṇis were killed by brāhmaṇas.

Tiruvaḷḷuvar was a Jaina but other communities also claim that he belongs to their community. Kundakundācārya (Eḷācārya) wrote the Tirukkuṟaḷ.

We have declined in numbers. There are people (from other religions) who tease us about our nude monks.

Understanding of Caste

In the past even if other communities touched us, we used to change our clothes, purify ourselves and the entire house

because of their eating habits – eating flesh. It was seen as *tīṭṭu*[57] – polluting. Because of this *tīṭṭu* we do not allow other castes who eat meat to enter our temples. We do puṇyajalam – *prāyaṣchittam* (repentance) if someone from a meat-eating community has entered. After delivery there are taboos. We do purifying rituals. The home is purified. Similarly when a death has occurred.

A Story of the Malaināṭha temple

Sukumara Panditar, 71 year old retired teacher at Cittamur narrated this story about the temple of Malaināṭha (the older of the two at Cittamur). "A muni came here – people here threw cowdung at him. He felt sad, and went to the Cenji raja. A *tuṟavi* (Digambara monk) does not go to the Rājā directly. 2 boys went to fetch water there, and saw him. He asked them to place manuscripts on the Rājā's bed. The boys did so. The Rājā could not sleep. When he asked the boys they told him the story of the tuṟavi. The muni told Rājā of the insult meted out to him by the people. He asked the Rājā to set up the image of tīrthaṅkara (out of rock) on the hill. Hence, the deity here is called Malai-nāthar (the hill deity). At Jinakāñci, there was debate and conflict between Jainas and Buddhists. After that the maṭha was shifted to Cittamur. Around 1400 to 1450 years ago. My elders told me this when I was a child."

The story of the way the (later) temple here came about

Jainas from all over Tamilnadu got together and placed a head of the matham to look after the institution, after Agalur's Cakravarti svami (previously maṭhātipati) took nirgrantha diksa (became a Digambara monk) and his mukti. Before the Agalur svami's time – initially there was a brick

[57] Tīṭṭu , a brāhminical concept, seems to have entered the Tamil Jaina system.

structure. When the temple was in a bad shape he thought he should renovate it. For that you needed to find a pure spot – a spot where, if you were to dig up to five feet in depth, you should hit on water. Sand was sifted and purified. And bricks were laid in the *kaṭṭāyam naṭṭāiyam* arrangement – bricks laid horizontal and vertical manner, alternatively). They kept building until the roof. When they were to about do abhiśekam the gōmukham fell and broke. It was considered inauspicious and could not be completed. Then, Cakravarti Svami from Agalur was made maṭhātipati. He went to other temples too, at Tanjavur, Cuddalore, and so forth.

The temple was renovated in 1948. Cakravarti's son became maṭhātipati after him, renovated the Malaināthar temple. A pratiṣṭhā mahōtsavam was held to renovate the same again in 1978.

This was an agrahāram earlier. Those brāhmaṇas left. They say there was a Perumāḷ koil here. They found an idol in a flower garden. This was kept in a temple called bhajana koil (non Jaina) recently.

'Sacred' circulatory space – for Melcittamur Jainas

People go to Arpakkam for piercing ears of the child; and for first tonsure at Tirunarungondai.

The stories they relate to include the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa, which they say were "our stories", but have been interpreted and changed (and owned) by other religions. There is none to challenge that (overwhelming tradition). Śrīpurāṇam, Mērumantarapurāṇam, Cīvakacintāmaṇi are also the texts most of them know of.

Among their everyday rituals, prayers, related matters, the women say reciting the bhaktāmara stotra keeps obstacles at bay. And they have certain daily routines. Among other ritual stipulations. Everyday routine included reciting the pancanamaskara mantram first thing in the morning, invoking the pancaparameṣṭis, namely, the arahat (jina), siddha, ācārya (āyiryāṇam), upādhyāya (uvajjhāyaṇam), sādhukaḷ (savva sāhuṇam). They have their dinner or the last meal of the day at 6 pm, but there are concession for old people and sick people. And the employed people in today's context. .But they do not have rice after 6 pm, only 'tiffin' (dosai, upma, and other Tamil snacks). Some take milk and fruits.

There are the usual Jaina taboos - onion, garlic, tubers, and potatoes (but a few people, one is told, have started consuming these of late). Buttermilk and curd are very important part of the meals, as for every Tamil – which has perhaps become part of the larger 'Tamil' food culture. Once every four months, women say they observe the 8 days of āṣṭānyam (aṣṭāhnikam) without fail, between the *tithis* aṣṭami and pourṇami, anytime within these two. Ādi kārttikai, maci panguni, nombu, strictures.

They have evolved their own taboos of what is not allowed on which day of the week (which may have developed in later times). Coconut *tohayal* (grated coocnut made into a thick paste / chutney) is not allowed on Mondays; pumpkins on Tuesdays, cucumber (veḷḷerika) on Fridays, and so forth.

There is an initiation that women call 'nōmbu vānkikiṟatu' – on the full moon 'tithi' (time-period) / pourṇami. After washing their hair and offering pujai to the deity (tīrthaṅkara) they 'take the vratam / nōmbu' from the temple priest. Women take nōmbus for specified days (called vratam

nal / days) and in this time they do not even drink water until dawn of the next day. And their last meals (including milk, fruits or medicines) are to be consumed before 5 pm. They are not supposed to bathe, or talk if they happen to take the nombu on the 1st day of the full moon. They have a practice called 'kēṭṭa nōmbu' where women take upadeśam and recite the name of the tīrthankara (they have a choice taking the name of a tīrthankara they relate to most) before taking food or water.

Then there is the narration of the Cekkiḷi Rājā katai (narrated in the previous chapters). Some here even identify this king with the Arcot nawab and say he forced Tamil Jainas to flee. They turned into Śaivas and are called 'nīrpūci nayiṉārs' Other communities have kept their faith growing (not the Tamil Jainas). Before the nawab's times, people were in good condition. Kings were generous. There were many brāhmiṇs too in this village who fled.

On the question of agriculture, the Tamil Jainas believe they were the original agriculturists. [58] Sundari says, the 'violence' in agriculture (use of chemicals pesticides) is inevitable but as far as possible "we avoid tilling the land; engaging in farming activities ourselves. We have people doing that for us. We cannot do any job if we were to take the non killing concept to the extreme." But only those that can afford the cost of labour on land give it to other castes to till the land. There are many Tamil Jainas who work on their fields themselves.

[58] In this connection see discussion on the vellala agriculturists and Marai Malai Atikal's book on the community that according to him introduced farming, and related discussion in Chapter II (on the Dravidian and Self Respect Movement)

Children (aged 8 to 13) had their own idea of their history – they immediately recounted the 8,000 śamaṇa munis (monks) in Madurai in Eṉṉāyiram and the killing of Jaina monks there, according to them 100 Jaina monks resided in 8 hills around Madurai at one time. Jaina muni Eḷācārya wrote the Tirukkuṟaḷ and Nālaṭiyār. And they added, Jainism came in protest against the bad practices of Hindu religion. They do know that there were once some difficult, challenging times for the Jainas. According to them since Jainism has very strict rules, it did not become very popular. They were not sure about bhakti movement and persecution.

It must be noted that in none of the conversations, except the one with the retired school teacher, Sukumara Panditar did the subject of the temple or its history of inscriptional record come up. For a large part in Cittamur, history was what was made out from the idea of practices of the Jaina religion and the Ṛṣabha mythology about creation of vocations. Malainātha temple figured in the teacher's narrative but that again, bordered on the story tradition, and depicting a spectacle as the important aspect of Malainātha temple. No one recounted the number of grants made to the temple by any ruler or patrons. The story of the place being a brāhmiṇ centre earlier is important. Though the inscriptions do not mention this fact. Or about the existence of the Perumāḷ temple prior to the Malainātha or Pārśvanātha temple.

Inscriptional History

One would begin with the Tirunātharkuṉṟu inscriptions here. A place close to Cenji, but not too far away from Cittamur either. The maṭhātipati of Jinakāñci maṭham was kind enough to guide me to this place, saying it was an important sacred centre, since it speaks of sallēkhana (an important event, of

fasting unto death) of acaryas there. Thereafter, one will return to the inscriptional history of Cittamur.

Tirunātharkuṉṟu (Siṅgavaram), Cenji

Chittamur, Cenji (Gingee), South Arcot (Tiruvannamalai district) have had continuous Tamil Jaina occupation from the 9th to 20 centuries AD

* On rock in hill called Tirunātharkuṉṟu near village Sengavaram[59]

5th-6th centuries AD
Tamil Brāhmi

Records that it is the place of penance of Chandranandi the monk, who died observing 57 days fast. (sallēkhana)

* Same rock

10th century AD [60]

Tamil
Records death (niśīdika) of Iḷayaṉpaḍārar who fasted for 30 days.

Cittamur / Melcittamur
* 888 AD (17th regnal year, Choḻa, Rājakesarivarmaṉ (Āditya I)[61]

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[59] A. Ekambaranathan, C. Sivaprakasam, Jaina Inscriptions in Tamilnadu (A Topographical List), Research Foundation for Jainology, Chennai, 1987 (henceforth, Ekambaranathan, 1987), p. 379. Also in SII, XVII, No. 262; ARE 239 Of 1904

[60] SII XVII, 261; ARE 238 of 1904

[61] AR 201 of 1902, SII VII, No. 828; Ekambaranthan, 1987, p. 341

Records that one Maṭiyaṉ Ariṉtigai of Puttambūr endowed a gift of burning a perpetual lamp in the Kāṭṭāmpaḷḷi (Malainātha temple) and the gift was entrusted with Ārambanandi, Paḍamūlattār and the ūrār.

* At the base of boulder containing Jaina images in the Malainātha temple.[62]
Choḻa queen Kaḍarkoṉpāvai, 9th century AD characters. Mentions Kaḍavarkoṉpāvai, queen of a Choḻa king. She is said to have revived some endowments to the temple which fell into disuse.

Kaḍavarkoṉpāvai is identified with the queen of Āditya I and therefore the record is assigned to 9th century AD.

* On base of central shrine of Pārśvanātha temple[63]

1136 AD – 18th regnal year of Choḻa Rājakesari Vikramadeva.

"Registers gift of 3 ma of wet land in some villages to the temple. The inscription is now lost. It is interesting to observe that the lands gifted to the temple are said to have been found in more than fifty villages in and around Gingee and Tindivanam taluks."[64]

Details[65] – The lands are gifted probably by the people of the villages mentioned as it says "*nām tarumamāka kaṭṭalai yiṭṭom 22 aṭi kuḷi 100 koṇṭatu oṟu marvāka iṉṉattu vañkalatttāṟum koḷḷāṟum nemaliyum .....*"

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[62] Ekambaranathan, 1987, p.342.. AR 203 of 1902, SII VII, no 830

[63] Ibid, p.343 and; SII Vol I, No. 26

[64] Ibid, p.343
[65] SII, Vol. I, No. 26

Some of the names mentioned of the villages in the inscriptions are "...Vīranāmūr, Arukavūr, Viḻukkam, Eḷamaṅkalam, Neṟkuṉṟam, Toṇḍūr, Viḍār...Somāsipāḍi... (such villages with lands that yield good harvests of pulses – 'payiṟ ciṟuvalarum mayalmaṅkaiyāna...'Interestingly there are brief descriptions of the lands – 'maṅkalamum kaṇamāna Karuṇākara Peṭimaṅkalamum...Maḷaiyaṉūr...Toruppaṭi, Vaḷḷam...Nāṭṭārmaṅkalam...gifted 3 mā of nañjai (wet) land as sarvamānyam (tax-free) –'*ūrāḷ nilam mūṉṟuma nañcai nilam ittevaṟku sarvamāniyamākka kaṭṭalaiyiṭṭōm*'. We give to this tēvar (deity in the temple, Pārśvanātha)...." [66]

All these villages are in the immediate vicinity of Melcittamur / Cittamur.

* On base of mantapa in front of central shrine of Pārśvanātha temple[67]

Choḻa – Kuḷottuṅga Choḷa, 12th regnal year, 1148 AD.

<u>Registers gift of village Siṟṟāmūr as dīrgamāṇya to the deity Pārśvanāthadēva in the temple of Paḷḷiāḻvār, by a certain Devaraḍiyār.</u>

This record is also lost.

* On a slab built into the floor of the maṇṭapa in front of the Malainātha temple [68]

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[66] Krishnamurthy, <u>Ceñjippakutiyil Camaṇam</u>, Sekar Publications, Chennai, 1994, pp. 222-223

[67] Ekambaranathan, 1987, p.344; and SII. I, no.28

[68] Ibid, p. 345 and; ARE 202 of 1902, SII, VII, no.829

Chola Rājādhirāja II, 10th regnal year, 1173 AD
Records gift of 4 ma of land by a Sambhuvarāya of the Sengeni family, who is said to have conquered the Pāṇḍya country. The Sambhuvarāya chieftain of this record is the same as Sengeni Ammaiappan who on behalf of Cholas fought against the Pāṇḍyas, and thereby got the title Pāṇḍyanāḍu Koṇḍān.

* On base of mukhamaṇṭapa of central shrine of Pārśvanātha temple[69]

1218 AD (?) Śaka 1140. Vijayanagar dynasty

Registers gift of 91 kuḷi of land below the tank for providing offerings, etc. and for the expenses of festival to the god Simhapurināthadeva and 30 kuli of land for the worship etc to the god Pārśvanātha of the Maḷaiyanātha temple at Chittamur, a paḷḷicandam in Siṅgamporuḍavalanāḍu. The inscription apparently belongs to the reign of Vijayanagara Krishnadevarāya as we do not know any king as Mahāmaṇḍaleśwara Viṣṇudeva Mahārāya. In that case, the Śaka year would be 1441, corresponding to 1519 AD.

* On a slab called Sanyāsikal set up in the village.[70]
Śaka 1503 / 1581 AD,
Nāyaka Vaiyappa Krishnappa Nāyaka.

Registers grant of village Sirrāmūr in Uḍaikkaḍunāḍu, a sub division of Tiruvāḍi-rājyam in Vaḷudilampaṭṭu –savadi of Tirumuṇaippāḍi-nāḍu for the sacred bath (abiśekam) and

[69] Ibid, p.346 and; SII Vol I, no. 27
[70] Ibid, p. 347; and AR 68 of 1935-36

offerings to the god Chidambareśvara by Bommaiyapiḷḷai as the gift of Vaiyappā Krishnappa Nāyaka.

It is interesting to note that the Jaina village Chittamur had been granted to the Naṭarāja temple at Chidambaram when Vaiyappa Krishnappa Nāyaka was ruling over the Gingee region as the agent of Vijayanagara kings. In all probability, the gift of the village here refers to the lands other than those of the Jaina temple.

One is not certain as to how Ekambaranathan draws such a conclusion. It could be possible that in some way the village was providing for the Naṭarāja temple endowment.

* On base of mānastambha in the Pārśvanātha temple[71]
1578 AD, Śaka 1500.

States that the mānastambha was the gift of Būsseṭṭi, son of Bāyiseṭṭi, a Vaiṣya of Jagatāpiguṭṭi (village in Anantapur district, Andhra Pradesh).

* 1582 AD. Tamil grantha. Vijayanagara. Sri Rangadeva Mahārāya[72]

<u>Gift of all wet lands and dry lands watered by the northern tank as paḍijīvitam for the five musicians (like the uḍal, nāgasvaram, nāṭṭuvaṉ, etc) of the Simhapurinātha temple by Timmappanāyaka, agent of Atchutappa Nāyakkar Aiyyan in the reign of Śri Rangadevamahārāya, the Vijayanagar king. Atchutappa Nāyakkar is identified with the Tanjore Nāyak</u>

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[71] Ibid, p.348; ARE 517 of 1937-38

[72] Ibid, p.350 ; SII, I, No.29, emphasis, wherever, mine.

ruler of the same name. His son, Raghunātha Nāyakkar also finds place in two inscriptions from Chittamur.

* 1586 AD, Śaka 1508, Vijayanagar; Venkaṭapatideva Mahārāya.[73]

Registers grant of manya lands attached to the Simhapurinātha temple and in the enjoyment of 12 **devaraḍiyārs**, as sarvamāṇya removing the water cess, as ordered by Raghunatha Nāyakkar Aiyaṉ. The practice of enjoying devaraḍiyārs (maid servants dedicated to the temple service was not very common in Jaina establishments)

* 1603 AD, Vijayanagar Mahāmaṇḍaleśwara Venkatapatideva Mahārāya.[74]

Registers the removal of water cess on the manya lands of the god Nēminātthasvāmi of the Simhapurinātha temple left in the enjoyment of the paṇḍita, pūjuka, devaraḍiyār and the mēḷakkārar (drummer) thus making them Sarvamāṇya for the merit of Raghunātha Nāyakkar Aiyaṉ and Dīkshitar Aiyaṉ. These two names would mean only the Tanjore Nāyak ruler Raghunātha and his famous minister Govinda Dīkshita.

* Sanskrit Grantha[75]

States that Abhinava Ādisenā Bhaṭṭāraka erected the gōpura with Jaina temples by public subscription.

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[73] Ibid, p.351; SII I, no. 30 (one of the few instances where the devadasi concept mentioned)

[74] Ibid, p.352; SII I, no. 31

[75] Ibid, p.353; 1865 AD, Saka 1787; ARE 520 of 1937-38

Subsequent inscriptions, of additions to temple by laity Jaina (1903 AD, by Jaina from Tirupparambūr, Bālaiya and his wife; 1951 by maṭhatipati himself.

General Information on Cenji and Few Jaina (still settled) villages around Cenji

"The Malainātha temple belongs to the 9th century AD while the Pārśvanātha temple is dated to 16th century AD. In 1865, under the auspices of the maṭhātipati, Abinava Ādisenā, the gopuram of the Pārśva temple was built. Cinnakuḻa[illegible]aisvami, Vimalanāthasvāmi and Appāvusvāmi from Vīranamūr. were the mathatipatis respectively in the year 1915. Akaḷūr's Cakravarti svāmi, his son, Samudravijayan Svami, Eḻumbūr's Candrakīrti Śāstri, Tachūr Śripalavarṇi, Vaḷatti Cakravarti Svāmi were all maṭhātipatis in this place, successively...."[76] There are 35 Tamil Jaina families in Cenji town.[77]

Vilukkam, Tindivanam, South Arcot

Community Narratives

30 households (130 people approximately) – earlier there were around 60 households, who have since migrated

Here one heard the 'sumantāntalaipattu' story for the first time. The story has been dealt with in detail in a previous chapter.

In this village, too, the understanding of their history and the history of the village in its relationship to Tamil Jaina

[76] Krishnamurthy, Cenjip Pakutiyil Camaṇam (Tamil), Sekar Patippakam, 1994, p.102-03

[77] Ibid, p.104

history was relatively better defined than the one in Melcittamur.

Among others, S. Dharmendiran, Gandharvai, A. Parsuvanathan, Vrishabha Das, Aruka Das and Jeevakumari spoke to me here. Again, it was a group discussion.

In this village, again, there was an important story relating to the Jaina community identity and allusion made to Desinga raja; as well as the number '70', or '72' from Vilukkam, figured. One has alluded to the number motif in veḷḷāḷa stories, and in inscriptions earlier.

Here people told me that "the Candiranātha temple at Cittāmūr was built 5000 years ago, *Kaliyugādi* 59. Prior to that an *ammaṉ koil* (a mother goddess temple) existed there (not Perumāḷ koil as people in Cittāmūr said). The temple for tīrthankara was built in Narasimha Pallava's times – 1008 kuḷi land was given for the temple. Dharmadevi and Neminātha images were brought from Mayilāpūr in Chennai for the temple at Cittāmūr, and Eḷangāḍu. And in our village we have temple of Dharmadevi. And Nemi in other two places.

Desinga Rājā Times, and the Cittamur Temple

Cittamur and this village have a relationship. Which goes back to Desinga rājā's time. The periya (bigger) koil in Cittamur was not 'ours'. Our temple was the Mallinātha koil alone. The bigger one was a Perumāḷ koil (there appeared some confusion here, for earlier they said there was ammaṉ koil there) and within an agrahāram Some Jaina muni came there. The brāhmiṇs broke a pot of cow dung over him. In Desinga rājā (Dharani Singh's) times.

The muṇi went to meditate at Cenji kōṭṭai (the fortress). Rājā's man came there. He could not retrieve his pot of water from the pond (near where the muṇi was meditating); to wash feet and hands. The pot remained in the pond. The man asked the muṇi what to do. The muṇi said the silver pot will return. I will give you a palm leaf (ōlai) letter. Keep it on the Rājā's bed. He did so. The next day the pot was retrieved. The Rājā, meanwhile, got (bad) dreams and could not sleep. He asked this man about the palm leaf, and he told him the entire story of the muni. The Rājā was told by muni that the latter was insulted at Cittamūr. Rājā asked the brāhmiṇs. They said if the Jaina muṇi will win us in a debate they can take over this temple. They spoke with disdain.

This village people of Vilukkam agreed to go to Cittamur. They had very little education since they were agriculturists. They agreed to go the moment the muni called; shaved their heads, took kamaṇḍalam, peacock feathers and went on the said date (for the debate). The pārpaṉar (brāhmiṇs) could not win the debate. They started by teasing the Jaina muṇi that 'you are so puny, and have the bigger ones - the 72 *(eḻuvattiraṇḍu pēr)* from Vilukkam seated behind you. Why don't you let them deal with us first and then we will deal with you? The Jaina muṇi told them – "of course, I am small made. Win over me first and then you can deal with the bigger ones!"

Like this they could not win over the debate. The Rājā decided the brāhmiṇs would have to leave that village. It was thus that the temple became a Jaina temple and the brāhmiṇs decided to leave that village. Since the 72 people from Vilukkam went with the muṇi to set up the temple (after winning the debate) this village gets the '*mutal mariyātai*'. During festivals at Cittamur, they give the first

invitation to people from Vilukkam. Milk for the utsavam (tēr, the chariot festival) is sent from Vilukkam.... This village is called *tāigrāmam* (tāi kirāmam). 45 per cent of households here have continued to help maintain the temple at Cittamur and those who migrated also continue to help. Today we are in bad state, in declining numbers and economically weak. There is none to read our own manuscripts (*ōlaiccuvaṭi*) from our community. We cannot read our own scriptures." [78]

They relate most to the Cīvakacintāmaṇi; they know of Cilappatikāram, Padmapurāṇam and Nāgakumārakāvyam Cīvakacintāmaṇi was the most popular – everybody knows of the story.

"Earlier people used to sit together and read texts. Today there is no time to do that. Nor many of those elders are left who did that. Who listens to old texts today? They only watch TV. However, since the last 30 years we are having *paṭṭi maṉṟam* (debate platforms) set up by few well read Jainas in different places. Earlier there used to be the *vādam* (debate), and *taṟkam* (philosophical discourse)."

Maṭhātipati's Election

"The maṭhātipati's line is around 700 years old. Earlier, Koḷḷāpura maṭhātipati used to nominate the maṭhātipati here. Now villages around here do it. The criteria for the position of maṭhātipati is that he must be well read, shouldn't have personal, household responsibilities. Information is sent to villages – they sit together and decide on a majority choice. People would sit together in the temple discuss and decide.

[78] The story has been recorded just as it was narrated, with a lot of people joining in, with inputs. The 72 motif is important. One has seen the '70' motif in the Nīli story.

Today it's no longer the same. Few interested in those things today, earlier there was a committee – now no more."

Reading out from article in a Tamil weekly, people tell me about the neglect of the Jaina centres at Sittanavāsal (Pudukkottai), Eladipattam (graffiti reported on a Jaina rock). "Unity in our community is wanting. Agriculture has become difficult. We have small pieces of land and labour charges are exhorbitant. Few still follow those old practices. Our identity as a community comes from those tenets. We celebrate Ugādi (the Telugu new year) in a big way."

Sacred circulatory Space

We attend the annual rathōtsavam at Melcittamur; brahmōtsavam at Jinakancipuram, Alagramam, Karandai, Tirupparuttikunram, Mannargudi. We celebrate 10 day festivals in our village. We have also been celebrating the aimperunvil̲ā (5 major festivals) since 100 years now. We started the practice in Vilukkam. With donations from the community.

Rituals, and Samskrutam

We set up navagrahas in temples. It is not important to keep navagrahas (not a tradition).

One of them recites the following stotra, which tells the influence of brahminical ritualism on the Tamil Jainas. But the interesting part is the includion of *Vil̲ukkam grāma śrāvaka śrāvakīṇām* in the same.

"ādityāy svāhā...pitrāya svāhā, suguṇāya svāhā, ōm svāhā, bhūm svāhā...bhū svāhā...bhūrbhūva svāhā....ōm hram hrīm hroum....asiya uṣa padmaprabhā jināya jinatāya paramajyothi svarūpavanāya āditya mahāgraha devāya

vṛṣbha jina jinātrya paramajyoti .....grahapati....somamagrahadevāya viḻukkam grāma jaina samasta śrāvaka śrāvakīnānam sarva dośa parihārārtham sarva dośa sarva śantim kuru kurum svāhā."

"We take our family's name if it is individually done. We offer puspanjali thereafter. And recite the name of 24 tirthankaras. We do not understand Samskrutam (Sanskrit) the way the seṭh s (the non Tamil / Marwari Jainas) do. We have older versions of Śrīpurāṇam with us, most of us have a copy. And Cīvakacintāmaṇi. Though they tell us the *tāi moḻi* (mother tongue) of Jainas is Samskrutam (especially the tai moli of Digambaras), Śvetāmbara tāi moḻi is Hindi. And some Marathi. All our texts here are in Tamil. Even stotrams are written in Tamil script..."

A certain attribution to the 'power' of Sanskrit, its sanctity, was perceptible here, and this may have been a very recent development.

Among tīrthankaras, stories of Ṛṣabha and Mahāvīra are known to every Jaina.

"During the Mārgaḻi Mukkuṭai viḷḷaku we light up lamps in the entire month of mārgaḻi (December) at temple everyday (even if we cannot light 365 lamps for an entire year each day – this one month makes up for that). We celebrate Navarātri, Vijaya Daśami. We must have done puṇya to have been born as Jainas.... Navarātri is meant for Pārsu tīrthankara (Pārśvanātha); Saraswati, Dharaṇendra, Padmāvati are worshipped. the 9 days – 108 sahasranāmam stotram is recited. Women offer *śundal (*made from pulses or grams), *veṯralai* (betel leaves)."

Status Today

Earlier where 600 acres belonged to Tamil Jainas in this village, now only 40 acres. Many migrated. During Kalaignar's (Karunanidhi in his earlier stint as Chief Minister of Tamilnadu) time we asked for Minority status and reservation for Jainas.

Tyagi Dharmanathan from Cenji was a freedom fighter (he belonged to Perumpukai).

The Śamaṇa Peroḻi president changes every five years.

Persecution Story

A king – from the cakkiḷi caste – in Cenji had three sons, two were married (here they do not say the king wanted to marry, unlike in other versions one has noted earlier). He sought a bride for his third son. Asked all the lower caste communities. Finally, he sought a bride from the pārpaṇars (brāhmiṇs); they told him there was yet another community which is higher than their caste, the śamaṇar. They told him people of that caste do not eat food after 5.30 pm and are vegetarians. They asked this king - during the Vīracholạ Pāṇḍya times[79] - to take bride from this community. When the king asked the Śamaṇars, they told him, if the dog's tail can be straightened, we will give our daughter to your son in marriage. In those times we had titles like Wodeyar (Uḍaiyār), Paṇḍitarkal, among us Jainas. At Kumbakonam they use the title Cheṭṭiār. Now the king ordered that whosoever wears sacred thread and sandal paste on forehead should be beheaded. '*Tillai mūvayiram*", "*Tirunaṟunkuṉṟam*

[79] Again, the time period is a matter of confusion. Here it has been pushed back to an earlier period in Tamiḻakam

Ayyāyiram" is a famous saying. Then came Eṉṉāyiram malai (where 8000 muṇis had meditated.)[80]

He then got his son married to his sister's daughter. When his daughter-in-law was pregnant, śamaṇa muṇis blessed her. The king then ordered his men to stop the killing of those with *pūṉūl* (sacred thread, sometimes also referred to as pūṉal) and *candanam*.

Another story (sumaṉtāṉ talai pattu) – A ciṟṟu aṟasaṉ (petty ruler) ordered 9 heads be brought to him. The 10[th] person's head would be chopped off. What we refer as 'sumaṉtāṉ talaipattu'. This way, many Jainas fled. Threw away their pūṉals. These are still there in some villages here; we call them nīrpūci nayiṉārs. They are still vegetarians, eat before dark At Arpakkam you can see them; we had our temple earlier there. Today no Jaina family is left there. But even today an entire population of nir puci nayinars lives there. Tirunaṟuṉgoṇḍai also has lot of nir puci nayiṉārs."[81]

Then there are a whole range of songs – lullabies, marriage songs and so on, with the names of tīrthaṅkaras, or yakṣis figuring in each of these.

Inscriptional History

* Pallava inscriptions – Nandivarmaṉ Pallavamalla (730-800 AD)[82]

56[th] year – 786 AD

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[80] The community regularly used the refrain "vīra Choḻa Pāṇḍya kālam" / times.

[81] In most of these stories the king's name not mentioned by the community; Thurston refers to same story and mentions the king as one Venkatapathy Nāyaka.

[82] A. K. Chatterjee, A Comprehensive History of Jainism (upto 1000 AD) , Firma KLM Pvt Ltd, Calcutta, 1978, p. 212

Kīlsāttamañgalam rock inscription.

Records endowment of 17 kaḻañju of gold to a paḷḷi called Pavanandivar for the merit of Pūṇḍi Muppāvai, daughter of Jinaḍiyār of Viḻukkam.

* Around footprints placed on a platform by the side of a maṇḍapa in the village (Viḻukkam). [83]
Mentions name of a monk, Guṇaasahāradēvar. Footprints are of Guṇasahāradeva who is said to be a monk looking after the Jaina establishments at Viḻukkam and nearby villages.

Perumpukai, Gingee taluk, Villupuram district (early name 'Perumpukaḷ')

A pamphlet released by the managing trustee and Tamil Jaina villagers of this village for renovation of the Bagavān 1008 Śrī Mallinātha Svāmi Jain temple in the village –

"Bagavān 1008 Śri Malinātha Svāmi Jain temple situated in Perumpugai village.....is one of the few ancient temples belonging to the early Choḻa period and according to recent findings of Archaeological department this village, known as Perumbhogya those days, being as old as a couple of millennium years, was thickly populated by Jains. This temple the place of daily pūjā and worship was being renovated from time to time though partially. Small repairs were made in the year 1940 though major portions remain untouched. ...."

It seeks donations to complete the repairs and renovation of this temple.)

[83] Ekambranathan, 1987, p. 422

Community Narratives

In this village the past is not invoked as much. People here spoke essentially of the present status of Tamil Jainas.

There are around 30 households here today.

C. Appandairaj, S.Appasami Nayinar, P.Manohar, A. Rajasekhar, P.Nemidas, K.Somakirti, Kasturi, Padmapriya, Vimala, Chandira Nayinar, Mohan Das, Jinadas were among those one spoke to.

Temple Worship[84]

Worship was happening in the temple here. It began with the pañca (parameṣṭi) mantram. The Jinakāñci maṭhātipati led the pūjā. Women gathered on a Friday evening (their weekly pūjā of the yakṣi Kūṣmāṇḍini Devi in the temple; the temple being renovated with donations). Generally, they do the pūjā on Sundays these days, they say, because of a popular TV serial on Friday evenings!

The Kūṣmāṇḍini stotram is recited - *"śrimat kūṣmāṇḍini devi ambā ambālicā, yaje gandham graṇṇa graṇṇa śrīmat kūṣmāṇḍini akṣatam graṇṇa graṇṇa...śrimat kūṣmāṇḍini devi puṣpam graṇṇa graṇṇa..."* and so forth

It seems an elaborate pūjā – dīpam, dhūpam, the process followed is tāntric. Women recite the *lakṣārcanai* – *"dēvi namah...jinālaya nivāsinyai namah... (*followed by ōm namah)*...ambā , ambālicā, ambicāyai namah...."* and then they chant this eulogy (ends with 'poṟṟi") in Tamil –

[84] I happened to reach this village on Friday, when the Maṭhātipati had planned to attend the pūjai in this temple.

"...maṇmuḍi pokiṉṟa malinamoṟu eṉṉaṅkaḷ mallukku iṭṭa nīkka
maṟaikka varum koḷkaigaḷ
maṉṉaipol vantuvīr manatai aḻaikaṭikka
kaṇmūṭum vēḷaiyum kalakila kar paṇai kaḷkoṇṭum viyāti nīkka..."
"...poyvāyum aḻuteduttakoḷgai pōṟṟi...nēmikkum tuṇai ānāy poṟṟi..."

"Since ādikālam (origins), non killing has been our tenet. We eat before dark, drink filtered water and say the pañcamantram..."

In this village most Jainas have small pieces of land, most marginal farmers. Just one or two families have sufficient land. One of them stays outside, in Tindivanam. The largest landholder is called Maṇikar (probably well educated people addressed as 'māṇākkar' as in the past; maṇikar may be a colloquial form of māṇākkar?). Majority here is economically backward.

People tell me they are fed up of doing agriculture. Since labour costs have gone up. Or they do not get labour that easily. So some have left villages and gone to towns in search of employment. Some have started petty business / shops. Some work in shops. "Agriculture was the only vocation for us once. Now we cannot afford to depend on it. Jaina villages are gradually being abandoned. That is the change affecting our community now. There are 30 households here. There are other castes like koundars. We were at one point of time in a majority and had people working for us (on eth field, mostly lower / other castes). Today we are not in such a good shape and are in a minority. So it has become difficult for us to find people to work for

us in the fields. And women from other castes (lower) also help in farm work, they are adept in it. Not our women. Our women cannot help in farming. Plus there is this feeling of this kind of work being below dignity (other caste women also work as farm labour and get some income for the family; not women in our community) Since they come from 'osanta jati' (upper caste) Women say – nayiṉār women are adept at household work; we cannot do activities like sowing, ploughing and so on. Other caste women earn coolie of Rs. 20 or so and both husband and wife manage the home. They have become better off than us. This is the main difference between the past and present...."

They narrate similar stories of the Cakkiḷi rājā. They also mention Desinga rājā as a good king (but do not know of the Viḻukkam story). There is community cohesiveness visible in this village – the better off seem to be helpful towards the not so fortunate. There are a few families in the lower rung of economic status.

Perumpukaḷ / Perumpukai in Inscriptions

Tamil Brāhmi Inscription dated ca. 4th century AD by Iravatham Mahadevan. "On the south face of the rock (known as Atukkankal) outside the cave. The inscription is enclosed with a rectangular border; weather-beaten and worn thin, but legible." [85]

"Neṟkuṉṟapaṭṭi – Cenji, found near Nekuṉūr tank. 2nd – 1st century BC, according to Krishnamurthy ("ki. mu. 2-1 ām nūṟṟāṇṭu" Mentions Peṟumpokai. And a paḷḷi there.

[85] Mahadevan, Early Tamil Epigraphy – From the Earliest Times to the Sixth Century AD, Cre-A and Department of Sanskrit and Indian Stuides, Harvard University, 2003t, p. 437

Peṟum pokai
Cekka utitayiya (u)
ceika otanni ke yiviṭṭa paḷḷi"[86]

"per ru m po ka ḷ
ce k ka ṇ ṭi tā yi yā ṟu
ce k ka ṇ ṭa ṇ ṇi ce
yi vi t ta pa ḷ ḷi"

"perumpokaḷ
ce-k-kaṇṭi tāyiyāṟu
ce-k-kaṇṭ-aṇṇi ce
yivitta paḷḷi"

"The hermitage was caused to be made by Cekkaṇṭ(i)-aṇṇi, the mother of Cekkaṇṭi of Perumpokaḷ."[87]

"The place may be identified as the modern village of Perumpokai, about 5 km from this site. It is an ancient Jaina settlement with rock-cut stone beds in the local cave. The name literally means 'great fame' (perumpukaḷ). Cekkaṇṭi (is) the name of a Jaina nun...The nun is described as the mother (tāyiyāru) of cekkaṇṭi, both mother and daughter having the same name, Probably the honorifc suffix – aṇṇi has been added to the mother's name to distinguish her from the daughter. They were both Jaina nuns as indicated by the title kaṇṭi. Presumably the mother gifted the hermitage (paḷḷi) to the daughter. The cave shelter has only a single stone bed."[88]

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[86] K. Krishnamurthy, Ceññippakutiyil Camaṇam (Tamil), Sekar Patippakam, Chennai, 1994; p.240

[87] Iravatham Mahadevan, op.cit, p. 437

[88] Ibid, pp. 611-613

Peramandur – Tindivanam taluk Tiruvannamalai (Tindivanam / South Arcot) district

"Tradition says the author of Śrīpurāṇa (in Tamil) – unknown – hailed from Peramaṇḍūr. He went to Śravaṇabeḷgoḷa to learn Jaina religion and that impressed his teacher who asked him to translate the Mahāpurāṇa into Tamil. "A manuscript with title Śrīpurāṇa is found in the Jain maṭha at Varanga (Ms. No. 53) which says the author is Hastimalla (who has written works in Sanskrit and Kannada)....The title Hastimalla was given to him by a Pāṇḍyan king..."[89]

"Another name for this village (older name) was Vīragirāmam; and in older inscriptions Perumaṇḍai has two jinālayas, Candiranāthar, and the smaller temple is referred to as 'ciṟiyakoil'. There are inscriptions in the former temple of around 1500 years ago.

The authors of Śrīpurāṇam and Cūḍāmaṇi nikaṇṭu are believed to have belonged to Peramaṇḍūr. The people of this village are said to have helped set up the maṭha at Mel Cittamūr. The mūlavar in the inner sanctum is Candiranātha tīrthaṅkara. There are also Pārśva, Ṛṣbha, Bāhubali and Kūṣmāṇḍini yakṣi images elsewhere."[90]

The story of Candiranātha svāmi is mentioned as under –

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[89] P.M.Joseph, Jainism in South India, The International School of Dravidian Linguistics, Tiruvanathapuram, 1997, p. 333

[90] Sri Candiranāthar Jiṉālaya Gopura Tiruppaṇiyin Vaṟavu Celavu AṟikkaiPeramaṇḍūr Jiṉālayam, 1993. In Tamil – an account of the expenditure, etc of the temple at Peramaṇḍūr – has a little bit of its history mentioned. Emphasis mine. Because here again is another village that attaches importance to its agency in the setting up the Cittāmūr maṭham.

"Once Samantabhadracarya suffered from bhasma rogam (was constantly hungry) hence could not stick to rules of monkhood. To appease his hunger he turned a Buddhist bhikku . And took alms from every place. Based on the belief that Varanasi satiates hunger he reached there as a sanyāsi, met the ruler. He said he would feed 12 kaḷam naivedyam to the Śiva liṅga himself. The ruler consented. Sāmantabhadra ate all the naivedyam himself. This continued. People believed that the Śiva linga was eating all the food. In time he was cured of bhasma rogam; naivedyam began to remain as it was. The ruler saw this and accosted Sāmantabhadra and said he had fooled them, so he must bow to the Śiva linga as a punishment. Sāmantabhadra said the Śiva linga would not bear the power of his namaskāra. The king tied up the linga with an iron chain. Sāmantabhadra recited the svayambhū stotra and 24 tīrthankara stuti with deep concentration. When he started to recite the stuti of the 8th tīrthankara Candiranātha, Śiva linga burst in four directions. And in its place appeared the image of Candiranātha. People and the king were surprised, and all those people who were until then Śiva's devotees turned into Jainas. Today, at Kāśi there is a Candiranātha temple on the banks of the Gaṅga..."[91]

Community Narratives

40 families – 204 population, roughly

Shreyans Kumar, Lalitha, Suganthi, Padmalatha, A. vasavadattai, A. Vijayan, B. Rajendiran, Kuppuswamy, S. Hamsa Bai were among those I interacted with.

[91] Ibid. Note the story here of other communities converting into Jainas. And Śaiva Jaina conflict reflected in the motifs.

S. Hamsa Bai here told me that the Jainas at Peramaṇḍūr established the Cittāmūr maṭham and people here get the 'mutal mariyātai' at the rathōtsavam and other important ceremonies at the maṭh.[92] She also said the Tamil Jainas have gotras, and named a few – Jambuvanamār, Amōdara, Viḻupuradra, Kāśipa gotra (which is also called "Svāmi gotra" since this is supposed to be the gotra of Pārśvanātha) and that they have exogamous marriages (not from the same gotra).

Importance in the Tamil Jaina literary tradition

Maṇḍalapuruṭar (the Jaina commentator from the early medieval period) hailed from this village. This village also holds significance of helping establish the matha at Melcittāmūr. (*nelai nāṭṭinom* – say the people here of their role in the same) Author of the Śrīpurāṇam also hailed from this village. This village was also called Vīragrāmam. People say we came here from Agaragrāmam many generations ago.

Conflict

"There have been times when other communities teased and taunted when our naked monks came. Nirmala Sagar (a Digambara monk) came here. There was this man who teased him. But the moment Nirmala Sagar looked at him, the man's hands and feet became numb. He couldn't speak. When he looked at the man again he became alright. And fell at his feet. A Mutaliyār made foot prints in his memory. Villagers worshipped them. It went on for many years until one day they built a Kāḷi temple over there. Removed the footprint and placed them in our temple elsewhere. Those who built the temple thus were struck with ill luck – that was in 1974.

[92] This bit about mutal mariyātai is also written about in the Mackenzie manuscripts but there the mutal mariyatai goes to another village, Tāyanur. See reference in a previous chapter.

Later other ascetics did not face any opposition in this village."

Another version of the Cakkiḷi rājā Story

"During the (Arcot) Nawab times a certain raja asked Jainas for their daughter for his son. Jainas refused. Jainas got a black dog, kept a note on its collar and fled to Madurai by the night. The note had this message – if this black dog can become white, we will give our daughter to your son."

Maṇḍalapuruṭar's story (and Links to Sanskrit / Knowledge)

"He was an illiterate. His wife was well read. She would finish reading by the time he would bathe and return. In time to feed him. One day he was very late. She waited for long, and when he did not return she began to read. When he came, he saw her so engrossed, she got angry and said aloud, "phalaasai kusumam yathā'. And went to fetch food for him. He wanted to know what she had meant. He asked her, she refused to tell him. He said he would eat only after he had found out the true meaning of that phrase. He went to Śravaṇabeḷgoḷa to study Sanskrit. He was old. People used to laugh at him. But days passed, he had studied all the scriptures, kāvyas and others. He once sent a message to his wife saying he was coming home. She looked forward to meeting him. She prepared a feast for him. He came and had lunch. After eating he said, '*caaru caaru samam bhānti inkujīrakamiśritam lavaḷēṇa lōbha vriddhai phalam aasai kusumam yathā*' – you have prepared it all so well, rasam smells so nice...but all without salt!'

She had said to him, giving the analogy of Palaasa puṣpam (Laburnum flowers), which are so beautiful but without smell. That is, her husband is nice but without learning, it

feels like food without salt. He had said the same thing. She was very happy."[93]

"Nobody knows Sanskrit these days. Only Tamil."

Story in Jaina Rāmāyaṇam

"When Rāma asked Sītā to give agni parīkṣa, she went to mediate and became a (Jaina) nun. Rāma became an ascetic, too, later.

When Mandodari was pregnant with Sitā she got an intense desire to drink her husband's blood. Astrologer told her the child in her womb was not good for her husband. She left the child in a basket in the river which went to Janaka. A letter was also written and kept along with the child. Among Jainas Rāvaṇa desired Sītā since 10 bhavas. In the 10th bhava he lifted her and took her away. But he had a vow – to only marry the woman who would desire him. Not otherwise. So he waited. Sita's woes were on account of her past karmas – she had spoken ill of a Jaina nun and a monk in one of her janmas. That is why she suffered for 10 bhavas."

Rituals

Akṣaya tritīya commemorates Ṛṣabha coming for food after 6 months of dīkṣa. Nobody could give him food. Śrēyāns Kumar gave him food.

Āṇi māsam we celebrate śruta pañcami – a festival for Saraswati

Puraṭṭāci (September - October) – we celebrate navarātri

In Aippaci (October- November) – Dipāvali

[93] Hamsa Bai told me this and story that follows of the Jaina Rāmāyaṇam, among other such stories. Incidentally, she herself reads a lot, in Sanksrit as well as Tamil.

Kārttikai (November-December), we have the mukkuḍai viḷakku (365 lamps) and in Tai (January) – the Pongal tiruviḻā.

Other information

Pesticides we can't avoid. In those days we used cow dung, neem. Women have a concept called '*tīrthar sollikartu'* – saying the name of a choice tīrthaṅkara during āṣṭaṇikam ('*vṛṣabha tīrthankara aaṇati*") before eating. They say it five times.

Our village had over 100 households. Now we have barely 40, that too, with very few men. Agriculture has declined. Only around 30 per cent are into agriculture now.

Inscriptions

* On the west wall of the temple – gift of paddy by Gaṅga Pallava king Vijayanandi Vikkiravarmaṉ.[94]

Rājarāja Sambuvarāya granted land to Yakṣi.

* On a pillar of the maṇṭapa in front of the Candiranāthar shrine at Peramaṇḍūr.

In the 14th regnal year of Kuḷōttuṅga Choḻa (Perumaṇṭaināḍu) – 1192 AD

For the yakṣi maṅkaiyaināyaki in the temple built at Preumaṇṭai Iravikula cundari Perumpaḷḷi for arcanai and worship, the people (ūrār) of Rājarāja Sambuarāyaṉ Perumaṇṭaipārputtūr gave 200 kuḷi of land. (with boundaries

[94] SII vol VII, no 846; ARE 219-221 of 1902

to the south of Śri-----sluice and to the east of Tribhuvanamuḍaiyār devadānam).

* On the west wall of the Ṛṣabha nātha shrine in the same village[95]

866 AD

19th regnal year of (Ganga Pallava king) Kovicayanandivikkirama (incomplete).In perumpaḷḷi – 200 (kuḷi?) land for paḷḷi (?)

* On the north wall of the same shrine[96]

1193 AD

In Perumaṇḍai of Venkuṉṟakōṭṭam subdivision of Jayaṅkondacōḻamaṇḍalam – in the 15th regnal year of Kulōttuṅga Choḻa – for expenses for shrine of yakṣi in the temple – In Rājarājasambuvarāyaṉ Perumaṇḍaipārputtūr – as paḷḷiccandam – given by Maṅgaināyakiyar (who bought Perumaṇḍai?)

Agalur, Gingee, South Arcot[97]

Inscriptional History[98]

* On rock close to Jaina temple in Vaḍakkutōṭṭam

781 AD

[95] SII, Vol VII, No.847 (AR 220 of 1902)

[96] Ibid, No 848 – AR 221 of 1902

[97] Ekambaranathan, 1987, p. 337;ARE 258 of 1968-69

[98] There are still Tamil Jaina families – very few in numbers – settled here. But I have not been able to record their narratives here.

Pallava Nandivarman II, 50th regnal year

Records construction of sluice at Agalūr by Kampaiyaṉar and the endowment by him of one kuḍi per paṭṭi of lands irrigated by the lake for its maintenance and three naḷi per paṭṭi by the ūrār to the bhaṭṭārar.

* On south face of same rock close to the Jaina temple[99]

Pallava- 8th century characters

Records death of Kampaiyaṉar after the destruction of Toṇḍūr by the orders of Śrī Viśaiyātittyaṉ. Not known who Vijayāditya was and why Toṇḍūr was destroyed. The place of Kampaiyaṉar in the history of this region is also not known to us.

Jambai, Tirukkoilur taluk, South Arcot[100]

Inscriptional History

On rock inside cavern[101]

1st century AD

Atiyamāṉ; Neḍumān Añji; Tamil Brāhmi; Satiya atiyaṉ Nedumānañji iṭṭa paḷḷi. Means that the above abode was caused to be given by Nedumāṉ Añji, the Satyaputra.Unique record referring to the Satyaputras, identified with the Atiyamāṉs of Koṅgu country.

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[99] Ibid, p.338;AR 259 of 1968-69

[100] Very few Tamil Jainas left here. Could not record the narratives of the community here.

[101] Ekambaranathan, op.cit, p.360. Note mine.

Earliest reference to Satiyaputras is in Aśokan edicts at Brahmagiri. .. Atiyamāṉ Nedumāṇ Añji celebrated in Cañkam works as a great Śaivite *(?)* but the fact that he cause to be made an abode to the Jaina ascetic shows his religious tolerance.

Note: Which Cañkam works? And why does Ekambaranathan assume these to be "Śaivite" (and Cañkam works being Śaivite? And hence talk of "religious tolerance"?)

"Record of tax remission by the king (Achyutadeva) for expenses of pūjā (to the Jaina image, Nāyanār Vijaya Nāyakar at Saṉbai) and repairs in the Jambai (Jaina?) temple. A petition was presented by Vaiyappa Nāyaka to the king who agreed to remit *joḍi* and suḷāvari levied on the devadāna villages of Jambai temple, since 24 other devadāna villages had already been exempted from these taxes. The order was executed by Bomma Nāyaka of Veḷūr."[102]

Tirunaṟuṉgoṇḍai / Tirunaṟuṉkuṉṟam, Ulundurpettai, South Arcot

There are no Tamil Jaina families settled here or around here, famous for the Appāṇḍaināthar temple. But Tamil Jainas congregate here in the month of February to celebrate narkatci (which falls on the same tithi as Śivarātiri).

The temple priest's son gave me some information.

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[102] Karashima, A Concordance of Nāyakas, OUP, New Delhi, 2002, p.39. See, in this connection also Ekambaranathan, p.373; and SII XXII, 127

"Kamba Rāmāyaṇa was first 'released' (mutal pirati) in Tiruna̲ru̲ngoṇḍai."[103]

In this temple interestingly Śaṇi (one of the navagrahas) worshipped in the form of an idol. Śaṇi alone, without the other grahas. The arcaka says – Tirunallāṟu and Tirunaṟuṉgoṇḍai have that unqiue feature of just Śaṇi being worshipped alone.

Origins Story[104]

The temple was discovered during times of Rājā Rāja Choḻa's sister. Two Iṟuḷas (or *vēḍuvar* – Iṟuḷa tribal group is famous for snake catching and rat catching; but here he uses the term for a tribe hunter- gatherers, interchangeably) came this way. They stood atop the hill rock (that now holds the Candiranāthar gōpuram). On that spot they saw the *kapilar kiḻaṅgu* (a kind of tuber) and happily they tried to pull it out, unaware of the fact that there was this tīrthaṅkara's idol within. The axe fell on that image and with that one of the hunters lost his eyesight. He told his wife – there was no milk, no kiḻaṅgu, how did this happen? He asked her to clear the place (the thicket) and see what is inside. She found the bhagavāṉ's (tīrthaṅkara) image. She broke into a song almost spontaneously, "*appaṉē, ayyaṉē appāṇḍināthaṉē vaṟuvāyē uyiṟ taruvāyē eṉ kaṇṇa uḍaiya nāṉ teriyāna paṇṇa tapputāṉ*" (appaṉē is used for an elderly person, also a term for father; she pleads with appāṇḍaināatha to restore the eyesight of her husband who erred unknowingly).

[103] I have not heard that from any one else. Needs to be corroborated. But in essence it gives the importance of the place in Tamil literary tradition, besides being an important Jaina centre that had a rich endowment in the past. Interesting that this was the first thing the priest's son told me, and not about Kuṉdavai, which he came to later. There are layers to the history people recall that is significant.
[104] Refer also to Pūṇḍi; which seems similar in some senses (as told in Pūṇḍi Talavaṟalāru).

The hunter gained his eyesight immediately. The couple began to worship the idol. Padmāvati yakṣi appeared in their dream asking them to tell people about the incident. The hunter went to Rāja Rāja Cholaṉ and his sister Kuṉdavai. She came in a palanquin and later on, had the gōpuram built."[105]

The Festival of Naṟkāṭci and Asserting Identity

"This festival started around 20 to 25 years ago. Started because people from other communities started coming here and placing a vel (spear, of Murukaṉ) at the Padmāvati shrine. Our community members foresaw a potential to conflict there. It would later lead to people coming to offer animals in sacrifice and all that. Our community elders and the dharmakartā (trustee) of the shrine met and decided to organise this yearly gathering of Jainas here, like a festival to stop further encroachment and appropriation of our shrine. We have just celebrated our 25th year of this event. Called naṟkāṭci. It follows a 48 – days vratam. Everyone gathers here on a Sunday in the month of February. Our mathatipati also comes here and addresses the gathering."

About arcakas

He must know Sanskrit. Arcakas come under the overall control of the maṭhātipati. The maṭhatipati gives us pūṉūl (sacred thread) on āvaṇi aviṭṭam (does our upanayanam). Only after that we can do the job of arcaka. We have to learn grantham (script) and pūjā vidhānam. 150 to 162 villages have arcaka families. We are part of the Jaina community. Pūjā in temples is done by arcakas – but we also do

[105] Perhaps this place was sacred to tribal hunter gatherer groups – if we look at signifiers within the story – which got converted into a Jaina sacred centre, thanks to the patronage of Kuṉdavai. Interestingly, in some places, Murukaṉ is also hailed as 'appaṉē'. Though there is not enough evidence to substantiate this point, yet, the story suggests existence of a tribal group. The motif of the hunters (and 'kiḻaṅgu') comes again in Pūṇḍi, which one will come to later.

agriculture. Few arcakas are also priests at seth (Śvetāmbara) temples

Jainism is science – in science now they talk of filtering water, we had it long back. Doctors advise abstaining from meat. Our religion asks people not to consume flesh.

Since last 20 years we have our ślokas written in Tamil. In my father's times, they read form palm leaf manuscripts. Mostly in Grantha script. Now very few who can read them.

Agriculture

Since the time of Ādibhagavaṉ (the first tīrthaṅkara) Jainas have been agriculturists. We started agriculture.

The maṭhātipati

In our community the maṭhātipati is not an exclusive position or post unlike the Śaṅkarācārya. It is not hierarchical also. People elect the maṭhātipati. The temple trust pays for the arcakas; paid in cash these days as salary, some donations also.

Persecution

We were many in numbers earlier. Now very few left. *'Tiḷḷai mūvayiram'* denotes killing of so many from our community, 3000 of us in Chidambaram. *Ayyāyiram* (5000) [106] in Tirunaṟuṉgoṇḍai. Decline set in due to Muslim rulers. And other problems. Nīr pūci nayiṉārs in this village were earlier Jainas. They come to this temple today also. They also worship Murukaṉ, Gaṇeśa, Śakti. They are also at Ārpākkam. We use filtered water, wash everything before offerings; we

[106] The concept ayyāyiram used to denote Jaina villages, or number of people?

do not use certain fruits, honey, and sacred ash. Appar came to this temple.

About the deity (attributing supernatural powers) - This god is powerful. Unmarried people come here and circumambulate 108 times and have been blessed. Childless couples too come here.

Very few (Tamil Jaina) families are left here. Others migrated to towns.

Inscriptional History

* Above entrance of natural caverns on the Tirunaṟuṉgoṇḍai hill[107]

9th century AD characters

Tamil

States that the east maṇḍapa and the chaturmugattirukkoil of the Kiḻappaḷḷi (Jaina shrine) at Tirunaṟuṉgoṇḍai were the works of Viśaiyanaḷḷulaṉ Kumaraṉ Devaṉ of Talakkuḍi in Miṟaināḍu on the south bank of the Kāveri river.

"Tirunaṟuṉgoṇḍai is one of the very important places of pilgrimage for the Jains in Tamilnadu. The natural cavern on the hill contains a number of stone beds provided with pillow lofts. A little to the north of this cavern is the Appāṇḍainātha temple with the shrines meant for Pārśvanātha and Chandraprabhā. This Jaina temple had been

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[107] SII Vol VII, No. 1011 (AR 381 of 1902; Ekambaranathan, 1987, p. 380; ARE 306 of 1939-40

patronised by the Cho̱ḻas, Pāṇḍyas, their feudatories and the later rulers." [108]

* On western side of the natural cavern on the hill[109]

9th century AD characters

Two incomplete (Tamil) pieces, one mentioning Vaṉakovaṟaiyar and the other (much damaged) Āruḷaga Perumāṉ.

* On rock to west of natural cavern in hill[110]

9th century AD characters - Tamil

Records gift of ten pon to the two paḷḷis (Jaina shrines) by a certain Siṅgaṉūr Periya Vaḍugaṉār of Nariyappāḍi.

* On rock to west of natural cavern in hill[111]

9th century AD

Tamil

Damaged in middle. Seems to record a similar gift by an individual (name lost) probably the son of Periyanākkaṉār of Nariyappāḍi.

* On stone set up at the sluice of the tank[112]

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108 Ekambaranathan, 1987, p.381

109 Ibid, p. 381; ARE 307 – 1939-40

110 Ibid, p. 382 ; ARE 308 – 1939-40

111 Ibid, p. 383; ARE 309 – 1939-40

112 Ibid, p. 383-4 AR 320 – 1939-40

10th century AD
Tamil

Verse. Records construction of this sluice to the tank at Naṟuṉgoṇḍai by Aṟaipperumāḷ.

* On rock to south of the Appāṇḍaināthā temple[113]

10th regnal year – 995 AD of Rājarāja I, Choḻa" (SII says Rāja Rājakēsari Parāntakaṉ)

Ȧdikāṟacciyār Aiyaraṉ of Ammaṉūr made a gift of uncultivated land to cultivate good paddy for purposes of offerings (tirupaḷḷi-ūṭal) to the deity (at Tirunaṟuṉgoṇḍai) for worship....creating a new grant in her name altering the (existing one) of Kundavai (of an earlier grant)... Southern boundary Uḍubaṅkal...; a brook....mentions four boundaries of the land thus granted. ..Damaged.

Ekambaranathan reads it thus - "The inscription is damaged and left unfinished. Seems to record some land for the various services in the temple by an adikāricchi (lady) who was the wife of Aiyaraṉ. The boundaries of the land are also mentioned, besides a tank called Kundavaipēreṟi. The tank, Kundavaippēreṟi, was named after Kundavai the sister of Rājarāja I, Adikāricchi means wife of an official (adikāri)."[114]

He does not, however, mention the point about altering the existing grant and issuing a fresh grant, as is noted in the inscription. Important in that the person now making the grant does not seem to be from the royalty.

[113] SII Vol VII, No 1017; ARE 385 of 1902; Ekambaranathan, p. 384

[114] Ekambranathan's reading. Loc.cit, p.384

* On rock to south of Chandranātha shrine in Appāṇḍaināṭha temple [115]

1002 AD (17th regnal year of Rājarāja I Chōḻa

The inscription begins with the prasasti "Tirumagaḷpōla...." Registers grant of 10 mā of land to meet the expenses for burning two perpetual lamps in the shrines. Periyapaḷḷi and Mēlappaḷḷi for the prosperity of Pirāntakaṉ Arumoḻi alias Mummadiśoḻa Śri Rājarājadēva by Narasiṅgan Śrī Yamkaṉ Iṟamdēvaṉ alias Senāpati Mummadiśoḻa Brahmā Mārāyaṉ of Brahmadēyam Śeraḷāṇṭaka Chaturvēdimaṅgalam in Veṉkuṉṟanāḍu on the southern bank of river Kāveri. Donor of the grant was Commander in chief of Rājarāja I and the grant was made for the merit of the same king who had the surname Parāntakaṉ Arunmoḻi.

* On rock to the west of the Chandranātha shrine in Appāṇḍainātha temple [116]

1012 – 1044 AD, Rājendra Choḻa

Damaged. Begins with historical introduction tirumaṇṇivalara of Rājendra I. Records gift of 96 sheep for a lamp to god Paḷḷiyilāḻvār by Kaḷimaṉaṉ Vijayālaya Mallaṉ of Tirumanañjēri in Rājendrasiṁha Valanāḍu.

[115] SII Vol VII, No. 1015; ARE 385 – 1902; Ekambaranathan, 1987, p. 385. One has used both the Tamil inscriptions published in SII and compared the same with Ekambaranathan's. In case further details were important to furnish in our context, one has done so. This applies to all the inscriptions used in this chapter. Where one has used Ekambaranathan (1987) essentially, his book is mentioned first, followed by others. Where it is one's own reading from SII (or ARE) these sources are mentioned first followed by any other.

[116] ARE 300 – 1939-40; Ekambaranathan, 1987, p. 386

* 1031 AD, 13th regnal year of Rājādhirāja I Choḻa[117]
Registers gift of 6 kāśu by Ādi Bhaṭṭaraka Puṣpasenā (Puppacenādevaṉ) with the concurrence of Koḷḷiyūr Oppilāṭaṉ Uḍaiyaṉ for burning a twilight lamp in front of the Yakṣi in the Meḻīrpaḷḷi (temple on the hill) at Tirunaṟuṉgoṇḍai.

* On rock at entrance into the main shrine in Appāṇḍainātha temple[118]

Kuḷōttuṅga Choḻa I – 1070 – 1120 AD

Fragmentary and damaged. Contains historical introduction of Kuḷōttuṅga I beginning with the words Pugaḷnāḍu viḷaṅga...Seems to record endowment of paddy for a lamp in the temple by Rājendraśōḻa Ceḍirājaṉ. Mentions Uḍaiyār M[illegible]senā, evidently a Jaina deity (sic)

It could, however, be referring to a Jaina ācārya too?

* 1078 AD, 8th regnal year of Kuḷottuṅga Chōḻa I[119]

Damaged. Seems to register the gift of 40 cows for burning a perpetual lamp probably in front of the god Kaccināyakadeva in southern shrine of the temple Nāṟpatteṉṉāyiraperumpaḷḷi at Tirunaṟuṉgoṇḍai.

The verse at end of another epigraph of Kuḷōttuṅga III from Tirunaṟuṉgoṇḍai refers to a certain maṭhātipati. There is at

[117] SII Vol VII, NO 1013, ARE 383 -1902; also Ekambaranathan, p.387

[118] ARE 301 – 1939-40; Ekambaranathan, p.388

[119] Ekambaranathan, p. 389

present no matha in the village...The mention of the god kacchi Nāyakadeva in the temple at Tirunaruṉgoṇḍai suggests that the maṭha now at Cittamur was at that time in Tirnaruṉgoṇḍai.

* On stone at foot of hill[120]
Chōḻa Konērinmaikoṇḍāṉ

The nāyanārs of Taṅgaḷūr, to start a festival in their name – in the same manner as the already prevalent Tiruvaikāci tirunāḷ being conducted for the lord (Jina) Appāṇḍar of Tirunaruṉgoṇḍai Nārpatteṉṉāyirampeṛumpaḷḷi. Towards this end, to celebrate a festival in Tai month (January) named Iracákkānayan tirunāḷ – as said by Iruṅgālappāḍi nādu's Tāvattalaṉ Tēvar – within the four boundaries of this village, 3 parts to be given to the deity of this temple – uncultivated land is to be cultivated. Initial three harvests to be monitored and from the fourth harvest, to be used for expenses towards this festival. Record on stone and committed to writing (on copper plate?).

"Records gift of land by Tāttalaṉdēvar of Iruṅgolappaḍināḍu for the conduct of a festival in the month of Vaikāśi, and also for a special festival in the month of Tai in the Appāṇḍaināṭha temple. The land was entrusted with the tanattār of the Nārpatteṉāyiraperumpaḷḷi at Tirunaruṉgoṇḍai."[121]

* On base of verandah around the Chandranātha shrine in the Appāṇḍaināṭha temple[122]
Chola Kōnērinmaikoṇḍāṉ, 3rd regnal year

[120] SII VII, No. 1014, ARE 384 of 1902 (also p.391 of Ekambaranathan)

[121] Ekambaranathan, 1987, p.391
[122] Ibid, p.392; SII VII, No 1012; ARE 382 of 1902

Gift of 10 veḷi of land as paḷḷiccandam made tax free, in villages Kudalilādarpāḍi Vānavan Mādevipuram and Sirusāttanaḷḷūr to the paḷḷi at Tirunarungoṇḍai and to the Bhaṭṭāras attached to the same paḷḷi.

Details[123] – 20 kaḷams of paddy for harvest; for every third of the 10 veḷis of land this said portion, to be kept aside; Every three years ūrvari to be paid by the ūrār, of 25 kaḷams (of paddy); out of 200 kaḷams to be set aside for paḷḷi. Any transactions on this land to be according to the wishes of the amaṇa piṭārar, is the kaḍāmai (duty) of the urar. Kuḷōttuṅga Chōlan Kāñkeyarāyan, and Mīnavan Mūvelan).

* On a stone within the first prākāra of the Appāṇḍainātha temple.[124]
Chola, 1128 AD, 10th regnal year. Vikramachōla
Begins with historical introduction Pumādu pūnāra...Registers tax free gift of wet land reclaimed after a breach in the tank of the village for the expenses of the Vaikāśi festival to the gods. Arunmolideva and Nityakalyāṇadeva by Malaiyan Mallan alias Vikrama Chōla Malaiyamān. Donor seems to be one of the Malayamān chieftains who owed allegiance to Chōlas.

* On rock to west of the natural cavern in the hill[125]

Chōla
1134 AD, 16th regnal year.

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[123] SII, VII, 1012
[124] Ekambaranathan, 1987, p. 393; SII Vol I, No 73

[125] Ibid, p. 394; ARE 310 – 1939-40

Records gift of land under Kuṉdavai *ēṟi* (tank) after reclamation by Malaiyaṉmallaṉ alias Vikramachōḻamalaiyaṉ as Sīvigaippuram (palanquin maintenance) of the images of Arunmoḻidēvar and Nityakalyāṇadēvar on the festival occasions in Vaigāsi at Tirunaṟuṉgoṇḍai in Kuṉṟattūrnāḍu of Tirumuṇaippāḍi, a sub division of Rājarāja Valanāḍu.

* On rock to the west of natural cavern in the hill[126]

Kulottungachōḻadeva II

1137 AD - 4th regnal year.

Records endowment of 420 kaḷam of paddy by the measure Āṭkoṇḍaṉmarakkaḷ, out of the annual paḍikkāvaḷ income from the village Janarāthamaṅgalam by Ālapiraṉtāṉ Mugaṉ alias Kuḷōttuṅgaśoḻakaḍavarāyaṉ for offerings to (image of) Kacchi Nāyaṉār.

* On base of veranda around the Chandranātha shrine in the Appāṇḍainātha temple.[127]

Chōḻa - 1178-1216 AD; Kuḷōttuṅga Chōḻa II

"Verse in praise of Vīrasaṅgha of Jains and lord of Tirunaṟuṉgoṇḍai. It also mentions Kuḷōttuṅga and records gift of village Naḷḷūr to the Jaina temple here. A certain maṭhātipati is also referred to in the last line of the verse.

[126] Ibid, p. 396-7; ARE 311 -1939-40

[127] Ibid, p. 398; ARE 299 of 1939-40

This place seems to have had a math presided over by a maṭhātipati in medieval times."

There was a shift of the maṭham from Jinakāñci to Cittamur is what the Tamil Jainas remember; none speaks of maṭha at Tirunaṟuṉgoṇḍai (it does not figure in their memory). They seem to have two memories of the persecution. And a history that immediately occurs to them. Even the temple priest at this place did not know of an existence of a maṭha but told me of several villages that were around there. Probably the Jaina maṭha shifted thrice in that case - from Kāñci to Tirunaṟuṉgoṇḍai around 12th century to finally Cittamur in the 16th century. But is it possible to conjecture that the matha at Tirunaṟuṉgoṇḍai was set up after Ādi Śaṅkara's time, by which time, Kāñcipuram was a well established brāhmiṇical centre, and a 'śakti pīṭha'? In many these inscriptions the deity (tīrthaṅkara) is referred to as Kacci nāyakar; which might validate the conjecture that the maṭha shifted from Kāñcipuram – Kacci (another name for Kāñcipuram) - to Tirunaṟuṉgoṇḍai in the Chōḻa period and was given rich endowments of land; and Kundavai's patronage was instrumental in this. In that case perhaps the matha shifted from Kāñcipuram around 11th -12th century? The maṭha may have been different in structure perhaps from the present day maṭha at Cittamur? But why don't the Jainas refer to Tirunaṟuṉgoṇḍai as a place that had a Jaina maṭha?

* 1187 AD - Kuḻōttuṅga III (Choḻa)[128]

"Registers gift of three villages Āṟṟūrpaḷḷiccandam, Uḷḷūr (Tirunaṟuṉgoṇḍai) and Enādimaṅgalam by Aṟasanārāyaṇaṉ Ālappiraṉtāṉ alias Vīraśekhara Kaḍavarāyaṉ, as

[128] Ibid, p. 399; SII vol VII, no. 1011

tirunāmattukaṇi, to the god (deva) of Nārpatteṉṉāyiramperumpaḷḷi at this place a sub division of Rājarājavalanāḍu from that year as granted by his majesty (Aiyyaṉ)."

This includes nañjai, puñjai, wasteland and mentions nāṟpatteṉṉāyiram perumpaḷḷi, the 48,000 perumpaḷḷi – not mentioned by Ekambaranathan here.

* 1266 AD, 10th regnal year[129]

Registers gift of 10 mā of wet land by Kuḍaḷ Ālappiraṉtāṉ Ēlisai Mohan Kaḍavarāyan for maintenance of a perpetual lamp before god Pārśvanāthasvāmin in the mēḷapaḷḷi (temple at top of hill) Tirnaṟuṉgoṇḍai is said to be a village in Tirumuṇaippāḍi kuṉṟattūrnāḍu.
Kaḍava chieftain under Kulōttuṅga III.

* East of entrance to store room on northern shrine of Chandranātha shrine in same temple.

Chōḻa Rājarājadeva III, 10th regnal year (1226 AD)[130]

Registers grant of 3 mā of wet land by Koḷḷiyūr Oḍaiyaṉ for burning a twilight lamp in front of the Yakṣi image in the Mēl paḷḷi of the Nārpatteṉṉāyiram perumpaḷḷi at Tirunaṟuṅgoṇḍai.

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[129] Ibid, p. 402

[130] Ibid, p. 402-03

* Tribhuvanachakravarti Vikrama Pāṇḍya's 7th regnal year,. 1290 AD[131]

"Gift of 6 mā of wet land (not mentioned by whom) to god Appāṇḍaināyaṉār at Tirunaṟuṉgoṇḍai in Kuṉṟattūrnāḍu in Tirumaṇippāḍi.....Grant of miscellaneous taxes of kuṉṟattūr kōṭṭam for offerings and perpetual lamp."

It may be mentioned here that Ekambaranathan does not make a mention of who made the gift. Is it presumed that the gift is extended by the king? In many cases, where one reads the inscriptions, it is not so; and the king's regnal year is mentioned to fit into the format that was usually followed and it was a way of gaining sanction.

* 1361 AD; East wall of front maṇṭapa at right entrance[132]

Gift of land for perpetual lamp by a person (name lost) son of Śembai Viḷḷavaḍaraiyaṉ of Pāḷampaṭṭinam in Jayaṅkoṇḍachōḻamaṇḍalam. ....Gopanna Uḍaiyār was instrumental in this gift.

Tindivanam, South Arcot

Jayachandiran, Charumathi, Jayarao Nayinar (here they gave me a copy of the Idaiyalakkuravanci, which will be discussed in a while)

"11th-12 century AD characters. On pedestal of Ādinātha bronze image now kept in the Chennai Museum. Records that

131 Ibid, p.408

132 Ibid, p. 410; ARE 303-1939-40

this image was caused to be made by the Kīḻars of Agaram..." [133]

Kīḻeḍaiyāḷam (around 10 kms from Tindivanam, in Villupuram district) – here there is a measuring yard called 'kōl' used in Chōḻa times (protected under the Tamilnadu Archaeological Survey).

The Jaina ācāryas, Mallisenā and Vāmanācārya are supposed to have come here. The yakṣa Brahmadēvar of this place is meant to be powerful (says the temple priest). On Sundays and Thursdays they decorate the pādams (footprints) with candana kāppu. This village they say was Vāmanācārya's birthplace; and he also taught here.

Another Story

"A few goat herders noticed a huge box with palm leaf manuscripts (it was raining and goat herders had taken shelter under a banyan tree when they saw this box). They saw *āgamas* there; they told the Jainas of that miraculous sight. The local Jainas brought āgamas here; but they vanished to Muḍbidri (flew)" [134]

Possibly this kind of a story is meant to be in the reckoning, as it were, of being an important Jaina sacred place (since the āgamas – *siddhāntam* – were found here), hence the story. They use both the words *siddhāntam* and *āgama*.

"Siddhāntam was born here (written here) (*siddhāntam inge piṟantatu*) Today there are just five families here and one

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[133] Ibid, pp.377-78

[134] Of this account, some Jainas say there is another aspect to the 'vanishing' of the āgamas ; they say the āgamas were taken to Muḍbidri by a former priest of a temple.

priest. Earlier there were around 25 families. They migrated some 50 years ago."

An Advocate, Jayachandiran informs me that Iḍaiyāḷam is a central temple for the villages, Talavattur, Kalagolattur and Alagramam. There are some palm leaf manuscripts here, not many can read the Grantha characters. There is a *kōl* (measuring yard) on a rock in Kīḻeḍaiyālam – 3.7 or 3.8 meters, a 27-fingers kōl. It was set up in the 16th year of Rājendra Chōḻa - 16 tandu kōl.

The temple here was earlier dedicated to Śītala tīrthaṅkara; 100 years back they got the Ādinātha statue and placed it in this temple. The Brahmadēva yakṣa temple is called Sāttanār temple. It is a popular deity. The place has Vāmanācārya's pādukas installed with inscriptions. There are 7 Tamil Jaina families in Iḍaiyālam today. They are landed Jainas.

Iḍaiyālakkuṟavañci – 18th century AD literary work based on the folk / popular tradition of the kuṟavañci (written on piramatēvar, or sāttanār (the yakṣa)

The author of the book titled Iḍaiyālakkuṟavañci, published by Sri Veni Graphics in Chennai in 1988, is A. Tirumozhi. He informs that in his search for palm leaf manuscripts, one Mr. Chandirantha Jain from Uppuvelur in Vanur taluk and Villlupuram district handed over the plam leaf manuscript in his possession which had this literary work.

Kuṟavañci is a folk genre of Tamilnadu wherein a kuṟatti (of the hunter gatherer / bird catcher tribe) foretells the heroine of her future. It is usually a performative genre.

By the way this kuṟavañci is constructed, the Jaina author of the same, one Gñānasāgarar, from the 18th century (1783, as

precisely dated, in the month of Paṅkuṇi), seems to have utilised a popular genre to weave a tale around the central character for whom this kuṟavañci is written, namely, Piramadevar (Brahmadevar), or Sāttanār. In Tamil he is also variously referred to as Aiyyaṉār, Māsāttar, Aiyaṉ, Arihasutaṉ, and so on.[135] He is the yakṣa (guardian deity) of the tīrthaṅkara Śītalanātha.

What is today called Kīḻeḍaiyālam was in the past referred to as Iḍaiyāḷam. The place has a 15th century temple.

Kīḻeḍaiyāḷam, incidentally, is one of the few relatively later period Jaina settlements, but the effort of those who stay here seems to be to bring in a sense of antiquity and sanctity for the place in attributing to it a moment or two in the history, and sacred circulatory space of Tamil Jainism.

Meanwhile, the story in the Iḍaiyālakkuṟavañci, goes like this – The heroine, Cuntari, falls in love with the Śāsana devata Piramatevar (the yakṣa) and shares her feelings with the kuṟatti. The kuṟatti (just referred to as Paṅki, no name given) tells Cuntari, who has given her heart to Sāttaṅār (astride an elephant) and is love sick, that the man she loves will marry her on the day that in a month's time in this place (Iḍayāḷam) there will be the samavasaraṇam of the tīrthaṅkara – when flowers will ooze with honey, the koels will break into songs, thousand flowers will bloom, all doors of gods will open up to watch the samavasaraṇam and people will offer prayers to the tīrthaṅkara. That will be the day that Sāttaṅār will put a garland around your neck (will marry you) and you both will live like Indra and Śaśi.

[135] A. Tirumozhi, Iḍaiyālakkuṟavañci, published by Sri Veni Graphics in Chennai in 1988, p. 4. All references to the story from this booklet.

The samavasaraṇam

"The jina sits immobilised, as it were, on a lotus seat in the middle of a circular assembly called samavasaraṇa specially designed by the gods and is miraculously visible on all four sides. He is free from hunger and thirst, fatigue and sleep, and remains totally engrossed in the bliss of his omniscience. There is no actual preaching of a sermon. Yet an involuntary resonant sound (divyadhvani) of the Om proceeds from his mouth answering all questions simultaneously to the satisfaction of the audience. (Ādipurāṇa, XXIV, 80-5)" [136]

The kuṟavañci starts with the heroine Cuntari falling in love with Sāttanār, her state of love sickness and sharing her woes with her friend, the arrival of the kuṟatti and her asking the kuṟatti to foretell her future, and the kuṟatti telling her the above good news and being showered with gifts for doing so.

The kuṟavañci has a few changes from the usual kuṟavañci – the kuṟatti is a Jaina, who follows the Jaina śrāvaka ideals. Unlike in kuṟavañci where the kuṟatti belongs to the hunter gatherer or bird catcher tribes. [137]

The kuṟavañci begins with invoking names of Ādinātha, Śītala, Dharmadevi, Padmāvati and so forth. And the kuṟatti also mentions Jaina sacred places.

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[136] Padmanabh S. Jaini, Collected Papers on Jaina Studies, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 2000; "Jina Ṛṣabha as an Avatāra of Viṣṇu" (pp.325 – 349); p.344

[137] Tirumozhi, op.ict, p.7

The important point is the introduction of a love angle between Cuntari and Sāttanār – akin to the love poems (inspired by the bhakti concept).[138]

Inscriptional history

* On a rock called Siddharpārai near a tank in the village. Modern characters; Sanskrit, Grantha.[139]
Two pairs of foot marks, a book stand, two kamaṇḍalas , and two fly-whisks engraved on rock. And in a circular line round them is engraved in modern characters an anushtub verse, paying obeisance to Mallisenā – munīśvara otherwise called Vāmanāchārya.

* Round a pair of foot marks and a book stand is engraved the name Vimalajinadeva.[140]

Tirumalai, Polur Taluk Tiruvannamalai district (North Arcot)

This place is sacred to the Jains for various reasons.

"Firstly in this place 4 great Jain saints had attained mukti in days of old. The footprints of these 4 saints are to be seen even to this day – Vṛṣabhasenācārya, Sāmantabhadrācārya, Varadattācārya munivar and Śri Vādeepa Simhasūri. Secondly, it is believed that about 8,000 Jain saints (of the) 12, 000 saints who accompanied Bhadrabāhu from Patna did penance in this place and attained salvation. The image of

[138] It would be interesting to look at this kuravanci in depth – which one could not. But it suggests the use of popular genres by the Jainas right up to the modern times. What is interesting is bringing in the love element (akin to stories of Meera, a woman falling in love with the deity, here Cuntari with Sāttanār). Interestingly, her marriage to Sāttanār, if it happens, will be an event that takes eons to happen, or eons for someone to witness. A samavasaraṇam, no less.
[139] Ekambaranathan, 1987, p. 357; ARE 311 / 1938-39

[140] Ibid, pp.358-59; ARE 312 of 1938-39

Neminātha the 22nd tīrthankara (16 ft and resembles Gommaṭa of Śravaṇabeḷgoḷa, is built here). At the top of the hill a small temple dedicated to Pārśvanātha, the 23rd tīrthaṅkara on a 4 ft high stone (is also seen here)." [141]

There are at present no Tamil Jainas settled here.

Swāmi Dhavalakīrti, whom I interacted with, took his dīkṣa at Śravaṇabeḷgoḷa and came here to start a new kind of gurukula / āśrama. This place is now into a new kind of (Jaina religious) propagation. Poor Tamil Jaina students (and few from other communities) are given residential education and training in reading the scriptures, and observing the Jaina strictures.

This seems to be a new 'movement' in a sense, to propagate Jaina philosophy – in a sense a new movement in identity construction as well.

Svāmi (or ācārya) Dhavalakīrti (well versed in Sanskrit, Prakrit, Kannada, English, Hindi, Tamil, Telugu and few other languages and computer savvy) shared some of the following information -

All the important ācāryas of the past of the Digambara tradition hailed from the south, such as Kundakunda, Akaḷañka, Sāmantabhadra, although tīrthankaras were from the north.

Of the Bhadrabāhu retinue of 12,000 monks, 8000 stayed in Tamilnadu, 4000 in Karnataka. In Tamilnadu there were more Jainas since more monks came here (there are fewer in

[141] M.S.S. Sastri, "Tirumalai", Jaina Gazeete, vol XXVIII. nos 323 to 325, pp.120 -22

Karnataka). They stayed in Eṉṉāyiram (the 8000) malai. Their route was the following – from Mysore via Kerala, Madurai, Tiruchi, Tayanur, Cuddalore, Pondicherry, South and North Arcot. Many monks came via this route. There were a lot of acaryas from the (what is modern) Andhra region. Kundakunda was basically Andhra, but did his sādhana in Tamilnadu around 1700 to 1800 years ago. He is also called the kalikāla tīrthaṅkara.

Akaḷaṅka joined a Buddhist college initially He is also called Niṣkaḷaṅka. The guru found out that he was a Jaina (since he called out the name of arahat); he was forced to flee. An army was sent to look for him. A dhobi gave information and was killed. There was a debate (between Akaḷaṅka and the Buddhists) – those who lost had to leave the place, hence very few Buddhists are left here compared to Jainas. Today number of Jainas is also declining. Now you have namesake Jainas (like the nīr pūci nayiṉār)...

Another Cenji rājā story

A Muslim (ruler) asked for a daughter of Jainas in marriage[142]. The Muslim ruler came at the appointed hour. The dog tied to the pole. He ordered beheading of Jainas. Asked to look for those who wear sacred thread and drink filtered water.

Maṭham

In time of Śaṅkara, Jinakāñci maṭh had to be shifted to Cittāmūr. Jaina centres in numerous villages; lower castes wanted to enter our temples. Since they are non vegetarian, they are not allowed, not because of their caste affiliations.

[142] Apart from Tirumalai no where else did the Tamil Jainas allude to a Muslim ruler in this story. Surely this story has moved and circulated and new versions are being added to it, in keeping with the perspective on the past and who is the victor and who is victimised.

Eating non vegetarian food transforms the body into a smaśāṇam (graveyard).

Jaina centres today

There is no protection for Jaina centres. Temples, rock cut caves etc. Since our community is very small in numbers. They (government) are not giving us minority status either. We are running this free centre with voluntary donations.

The Digambaras in Tamilnadu are mostly bispanthis. For Bispanthis rituals are important - there is use of milk, curd, flowers; terapanthis do not use milk and fruits; only water. For Kanch panthis the time is very important.

Tirumalai has been an ancient Jaina centre; pañcapāṇḍavas came here to seek blessings of Nemināthа. The idol made around 2000 years ago. Śravakas have maintained the place since; many ācāryas have come here and stayed (during the cāturmāsya). Akaḷañka came here; they say he ran an educational institution here. Which is why we have also started this gurukula in his name - Ācārya Akaḷañka Vidyāpeeṭha Gurukula.

Even the monks accompanying Ācārya Bhadrabāhu came here and stayed, which is why this place has its fame and name. However, there has been no history of bhaṭṭārakas who stayed here. It is only recently that the bhaṭṭāraka of Śravaṇabeḷagoḷa Chārukīrti Svāmiji came here, around 10 years ago and felt it was necessary for svāmiji to be stationed here, to guide the people of Tamilnadu. He chose me - I was studying at Banaras. He did my paṭṭābhiśekam in '98 February. This is the 6th year now. We started a Vidyāpeeṭha with 9 children in a small rented place.

Today we are making efforts to know about, and restore Jaina temples, sacred places in and around here. Gradually, with help of śrāvakas, we bought 20 acres of land here, and built this dharmaśāla, hostel and so on. The number of students has risen to 140 now. Children are educated here, beyond that the aim is to protect and preserve our Jaina dharma in our country. The gurukula method of training is essential. Many other things we are involved in – like conducting eye camps in villages, around here, not just for Jaina people but others too....We help children from poor families. The bhaṭṭāraka parampara in Tirumalai has started with me; now and prior to this there was only the history of visiting sādhus / ācāryas / monks.... We have started the Ācārya Akaḷaṅka Educational Trust.... Jainas are in minority, so it is necessary to preserve our faith....We have done some renovations here at Tirumalai – 24 steps were made; 24 lakhs were spent on that.

Documenting Jaina centres and villages

We have begun gathering data about old temples, (shows the format), Tamil Jaina population, history, professional status, family status (economic well being) and so on. About temples, again, we are systematically gathering data as to the antiquity of the temples, and if old, how old, whether the temple is protected or needs protection, number of inscriptions found there, where. We intend to publish a directory on the people and the temples. There are around 170 Jaina villages in Tamilnadu and 200 temples around 25 or more rock cut caves. We intend to teach our students here to read the palm leaf manuscripts....

About rituals

About inclusion of the worship of navagrahas he says – as per (Jaina) siddhānta grahas concept is always there. There are 8 karmas and 8 grahas (rāhu and kētu are one graha) Tiloyapannati talks of vāstu. Worship of tīrthankaras is part of the religion. Each tīrthankara is associated with a graha.[143] Each tīrthankara is also associated with a colour. Hence inclusion of navagraha pūjā is within the Jaina dharma."

The importance of this new movement, if it were to be perceived that way, lies in the renewed ascertaining of the Jaina identity (in this case, not necessarily the Tamil Jaina, but a universal Jaina identity. Yet, the idea is also to bring out the list of ancient Jaina centres and renovate these; with a list of (here Tamil) Jaina villages and the economic status of the Tamil Jainas. That this place has a long historical association with Jainism in Tamilnadu, it seems to build on that continuity. And that continuity has a 'historical' legitimacy, in this case, with long history of patronage visible in the inscriptions.

Inscriptional History

* On wall of mandapa at base of Tirumalai rock to the right of the entrance[144]

A well which was given (dhammam) to Sirrinañkai the pious gift of brothers of the eldest son of Iḍaiyaran Appaṉ (an inhabitant) of Aruḷ-muridevarpuram.

* On south wall of maṇḍapa at base of Tirumalai rock[145]

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[143] Padmaprabhā – Sūrya;Chandranātha – Candra;Vasupūjya – Maṅgala; Mallinātha – Buddha; Mahāvira – Guru; Puṣpadanta – Shukra; Munisuvrata – Shani; Neminātha – Rāhu; Pārśvanātha – Ketu (and so forth)

[144] SII Vol I, no 71

1374 AD

On the nakṣatra (day) Uttiraṭṭāti which corresponds to Monday (tiṅkal) the eighth lunar day of the former half of the month of dhanuṣ of the Ānanda year, which was current after Śaka year 1296 (had passed) during the reign of the illustrious mahāmaṇḍalika , the conqueror of hostile kings, the destroyer of those kings who break their word, the lord of the eastern southern, western and northern oceans, the illustrious Ommana Uḍaiyār, the son of the illustrious Kambana Uḍaiyār, who was the son of the illustrious Vīra Kambana Uḍaiyār, whereas the great people of Sambukula Perumāḷ agaram, alias rājagambhīra chaturvēdimaṅgalam (in) Murugakoṭṭam, in Jayaṅkoṇḍachōḻamaṇḍalam gave to the illustrious Viṣṇu Kāmbuḷi nāyaka...of Alasu nāḍu, within Tuḷunāḍu (northern Kerala) a document (pramāṇa) about the cost (of) land...We the great people (hereby declare that) having thus agreed, gave a document about the cost of land to the illustrious Viṣṇukāmbuḷi Nāyaka. At the pleasure of these great people. I, Aṅkārai Śrīdhara Bhaṭṭa of Sambukula Perumāḷ agaram wrote this document about thet cost of land, this is (my) signature. The land - Agaram - south and east of field; sluice, for field, tax exemption for these lands mentioned ; 10 poṉ in 3 installments; signatures of Sambukula Perumāḷ, Agaram Śrī Kumaṇḍūr Arutala Perumāḷ, Kantāḍai Periyāṇḍai Bhaṭṭar.[146]

* On two broken stone slabs found in the Jaina temple[147]

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[145] SII, Vol I, No 72

[146] Land value - 40 poṉ - consisted of 32 kaṇis = 4,000 kuris of wet land (nilam), or 2,000 kuris of dry land (kollai) and of some houses (manai)

[147] Ekambaranathan, 1987, pp.258 - 259

881 AD

Records gift of gold to Jaina temple at Vaigāvur Tirumalai situated in Pañkalanāḍu. The bhaṭāras of the temple agreed to protect the grant.

* By side of rock to the left of the painted cave[148]

Chōḷa – 9th century characters

Records gift to temple by Nakuntamachchaḍaiyaṉ (nirgaṇṭamsaḍaiyaṉ) for the merit of his father, Vikkadi Aṟaisar. It is also said that Nirkuṇṭamachchaḍaiyaṉ's daughter was Lāṭamahādevi and her husband was Mumiḍichoḷa.

* By side of rock to the left of painted cave [149]

Rāshtrakūṭa
Kannaradeva (Krishna III)
14th year - 953 AD

Fragmentary, name of king Kannaradeva

* On rock to left of the painted cave [150]

Rashtrakuta .

[148] Ibid, p. 259-60

[149] Ibid, p.60
[150] SII XXIII, No. 65; AR 65 of 1907-08

Śrī Kannaradeva, 'who took Kāñchi and Tañjai' (19th year (958 AD)

Gift of lamp to the yakṣa on the Tirumalai hill at Vaigāvūr by a servant of Gaṅgamādevi, queen of Kannaradeva – Pridigaṅgaraiyar.

* Same place – Chōla (Para) Kesarivarman – 4th regnal year (11th century?)[151]

Gift of (4 kalañju of) gold for feeding one devotee (aṭikaḷ) daily in the paḷḷi on the Tirumalai at Vaigāvūr in Pañkalanāḍu, a sub division of Palakunrakōṭṭam, by two persons, Eran Puttugan, a temple servant (devakaṇmi) of the village of Kaḍuttalai in Irumaḍichchōlar Kannāḍaga (country) and Madurāntaka Karambular alias Somanāyagan Sanḍaiyan Āyiravan of Kaḍuttalai, provided to give food regularly to one devotee (aḍigal) in Paṅgalanāḍu (which was a district) of Palakunrakōṭṭam. 'So long as the sun and moon endure.'

* On boulder within the prakara of the Chandraprabhā temple[152]

Chōla
Maḍiraikoṇḍa Ko-Rājakesari (Sundara Chōla Parāntaka II)

6th regnal year (961-2 AD)

[151] SII, Vol III. No. 97; AR.66

[152] Ekambaranathan, p.262-63

Refers to the Mīlādu chief Naṭṭaḍigaḷ Siddhavaḍavaṉ and his wife Ēkaviran Danmaśaṅkaḍaiyar, daughter of Naḍavarīḷaṅkōṇaḍigaḷ. The chief may be identified with Nāṭṭan Siddhavaḍavan alias Narasimhan alias Śaktinātha belonging to the Śukra lineage.

* On buried rock in front of gopuram at base of hill; Rājakesarivarmaṉ, Rājarāja I[153]

Tamil prose and verses. 21st year (1006 AD)
Inscription begins with historical introduction of Rājarāja. Records that a certain Guṇavīramunivar (Guṇasenā?[154]) built a sluice called after a Jaina teacher Gaṇiśekharamaruporchūriyaṉ, the pure master who is said to have been skilled in the elegant arts.

* On the rock to the left of the entrance into the rock cut shrine facing east. [155]

Sanskrit and Tamil; Pallava Grantha script and Tamil language. Left side – Guṇasenā Pramāṇaṉ, seyda vidyā Parivādini kaṟ.[156]

* On rock between gopura and painted cave[157]

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[153] AR 82 of 1887, SII vol I, no 66; also Ekambaranathan, op.ict, p.263

[154] Guṇasenā is mentioned in the Pallānkoil copper plates. See T. V. Mahalingam, Inscriptions of the Pallavas, ICHR, Agam Prakashan, New Delhi, 1988, p.114. Malayakkoil inscription of Mahendravaraman I

[155] AR 221, 1940-1

[156] Guṇasenā, Jaina monk is supposed to have been adept in music, vidyā. "behold the method of learning this science, parivādini, as enumerated by Guṇasenā..." AD 610 – 630 AD; .Identity of this muṇivar is not clear. Rangacharya (Topographical List of Inscriptions in Madras Presidency, i, p.80) says, "Tamil literary tradition speaks of, i. Guṇasāgara, composer of the work, Yāpperuṅgālakkarigai; ii. Guṇabhadra, author of Chūḍamaṇinikaṇṭu; iii. Guṇavīra Paṇḍita, author of Nēmināthaṁ and Vaccaṇandimālai. The last of these was a contemporary of Chōḷa Kulōttuṅga III."

[157] Ekambaranathan, op.ict, p.264-5

Chōḻa, Rājendrachōḻadeva I, 12th regnal year (1024 AD)

Tamil and Tamil grantha

Records gift of lamp by Iḷayamaṇimañgai to the god of the Tirumalai temple, who seems to have been called Ārambanandin, and allotted 60 kāśu for the maintenance of this lamp and another lamp, which had been given by Sinnavai the queen of Pallava king.

* On piece of rock on top of Tirumalai hill[158]

Rājendra Chōḻa I, 12th regnal year (1024 AD)

Tamil Grantha

Inscription opens with long list of countries which king conquered. It records gift of money for a lamp (nandā viḷakku, twilight lamp) and offerings to the Kundavai Jinālaya on the hill by Chāmuṇḍappai, the wife of Nannappayaṉ, a merchant of Maḷḷiyūr in Karaivali, a sub division of Perumbanappaḍi. The Jaina temple was situated in paḷḷiccandam of Vaigāvūr in Mugaināḍu in Pañkalanāḍu, a sub division of Jayañkoṇḍa Chōḻamaṇḍalam.The Jaina temple on the hill is evidently founded by Kundavai the king's aunt and therefore came to be called Kundavai[159] Jinālaya.

The metaphors referred to in this inscription are not Jaina. For example, the Chōḻa king's conquests – "crown of pure gold, worthy of Lakṣmi, which Paraśurāma, who out of

[158] AR 80 of 1887, SII vol I, no 67, Ep Ind, vol IX, no 31; also Ekambaranathan, pp. 229-233

[159] This is the same Kundavai of Tiruuaṟuṉgoṇḍai.

anger, bound the kings 21 times in battle...had deposited (there)...the good Kosalai nāḍu, where brāhmiṇs assemble..." Mention of 'kaṭar cañkam (third Cañkam?) in all these sets of inscriptions, namely, SII Vol I. nos 66-74.

* On nine detached stones lying in the courtyard of Śikhāmaṇinātha temple[160]

1035 AD, 12th year of Rājendra Chōḻa I

Tamil

Fragments of records. Object of record seems to be grant of exemption from taxes on a land belonging to the Jaina temple, at Tirumalai, in consideration of a lumpsum payment of money. The names of several persons, probably of officers of the tax department are also given. The designations of two of these, viz. Brahmarāyar and Rājendraśoḻa Vā (naḍarāyar) seem to indicate that the king should be Rajendra Chōḻa I.

* On rock to left of painted cave[161]

11th century AD
Chōḻa Parakesarivarman

Records gift of gold for daily offerings to paḷḷiāḻvār (tīrthaṅkara) and for feeding one ascetic (aṭikaḷ) in the paḷḷi on the Tirumalai hill at Vaigāvūr in Pañkalanāḍu a sub division of Virchevagan Piḍāraṉ Buttugaṉ and

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[160] Ekambaranathan, op.cit, pp.266-267; SII, vol XXIII, no. 68

[161] Ibid, p. 268

Virchamanāyakan Chandayan Āyiravan belonging to Irumadiśola Karunādaga Kadutalai and Madhurāntaka Karunādaga Kaduttalai, two regiments of the king.

The two donors were from Karnataka. The temple was of widely acknowledged sanctity

* On rock boulder within prākāra of Chandraprabhā temple[162]

1062 AD Rājendracholadeva II

Records agreement by the Chitrameli Periyanāttār, an agricultural guild, to contribute the kadāmai from the pūśanam in terms of a specified quantity of paddy by Arulmolidevanmarakkal to the donee (details lost). The devadāna and pallichandam lands in the village are to remain as per the old agreement.

* Outer wall of door way which leads to painted cave[163]

1236 AD Rājarājadeva III, 20th regnal year.

Gift of village Rājagambhīranallūr, situated in the middle of Pankalanādu, a sub division of Palkunrakōttam, by Rājagambhīra Sambhuvarāyan alias Attimallan Sambhukula Perumāl to one Andangal Pangalarāyar, of Vīrapākkam in Tamanūrnādu. Donor was one of Sambhuvarāya chieftains who served as feudatories under Cholas. The village gifted was evidently named after the chieftain.

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[162] Ibid, pp.270-1.

[163] Ibid, pp.271-2; SII vol I, no. 74; AR 89 of 1897

Registers some gift to provide for removal of silt in certain tanks

Cyclic year of krōdhana in this record corresponds to śaka 1367 (1445 AD0 records decision by Tipparaisa Nāyakkar, agent of king, the tanattār and the Maheśvaras and also residents of Paḍaivīḍu, setting apart the money received as income from the fishing lease in eth tank (ērippaśi) from four specified tanks in the tirunāmattukāṇi of Tirumalai, for removing silt and deepening those tanks every year, and the amount of Vasalkuḷippaṇam (?) from the paḷḷicandam to deepen another tank.

"In a small shrine below painted cave (A Jaina teacher by name of Paravādimalla who was a contemporary of the king Krishṇarāja, is mentioned in an inscription from Śravaṇabeḷgoḷa in SII I, p.105, fn 1) records arishṭanemi ācārya of Kaṭaikōṭṭūr, pupil of Paravādimalla of Tirumalai, caused to be made image of a Yakṣi,date not mentioned."[168]

* 877 – 907 AD. Rājamalla II. Western Ganga. On rock containing Jaina images[169]

Kannada Grantha

Records foundation of Jaina shrine in which the inscription is engraved by the king Rājamalla, the son of Raṇavikrama, grandson of Śrī Purusha, and great grandson of Śivamāra.

[168] Ekambaranathan, op.cit, p. 279

[169] Ibid, p.280-1. Also Ep.In. Vol IV, No.15 A, pp. 140-41; AR 91 of 1889

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[168] Ekambaranathan, op.cit, p. 279

[169] Ibid, p.280-1. Also Ep.In. Vol IV, No.15 A, pp. 140-41; AR 91 of 1889

The inscription gives a list of names of the Western Ganga kings of Tālakād, whose influence was felt on the border areas of Tamilnadu in early medieval times. The Jaina shrine founded by Rājamalla is the two groups of sculptures representing Tīrthankaras, Yakṣas, Yakṣis, carved on the face of the rock, which could have been provided with some sort of shelter so as to form a front mandapa in those days.

Arani (North Arcot)

Vijaya (teacher), V.Devendiran, Manikya Nayinar (rice mill owner), his father Ācārya Mahāvīra Kīrtiswāmi took dīkṣa and became a digambara monk. At his rice mill gods and goddesses of other religions more prominently placed than Jaina tīrthaṅkaras as seen in other Jaina establishments. That was his explanation of interacting with people of other faith for business. He said it was in keeping with their sensitivity than anything else. Since his vocation is one that involves such everyday interaction. On the other hand, one thought, while talking to him, it also means there is some kind of consent for negotiating, compromise with what was dominant. Had his been a dominant caste, class, group, would there be talk of keeping in mind other communities' sensitivities? In one point of view this would be called peaceful co-existence, but in other, more difficult to accept proposition, compromise and bowing down to hegemony of cultural symbols, etc.

Mottur (North Arcot)

Here one met (and learnt a lot from) the *taatha* 'Chintāmaṇi Nāvalar' Nemi Santhakumar Jain, perhaps the only living exponent of Cīvakacintāmaṇi. He is among those who were inspired by T. S. Sripal to learn Tamil Jaina texts and recite

them. He became a professional and has recited Cīvakacintāmaṇi across Tamilnadu, which earned him several titles, Chintāmaṇi Nāvalar being just one of those. He has also been recorded by a few western scholars of Tamil. 12 Tamil Jaina households were here not very long ago; only two remain.

Pundi, Arani Taluk, North Arcot

The temple at Poondi (Pundi) near Arani, is a beautiful temple, but in bad state now. In Pundi there are 2 Jaina families now; and many 'nīr pūci' / Śaiva veḷḷāḷars are settled here and around. The temple is in the midst of fields, some acres belonging to the temple (given as grant in the past). Jainas in Arani taluk are mostly educated, urban, middle class, and show a strong community feeling – few of them are economically very backward. Vrishabha Das, Sambandam Chettiar, Rajendiran, Chudamanicudai, Chintamaniammal, Samanasamaya Sevamani were among those one met. One was informed (by Vijaya 'teacher' that Nīlakeci was penned here. And also that the famous ācārya Ajjanandi came here.

This very beautifully quiet and old temple, with the very beautiful sculpted image of the yaksi Dharumadevi, in midst of fields, is maintained by Arani, Putukamanallur, Ratinamangalam, Akkarapalayam Jainas. They do nitya (daily) pūjas, āvaṇi aviṭṭam, mukkuṭai pūjai, *tai* (5^{th} day vihāra mahōtsavam). The dharmakartā is one Jaykumar Jain (rice mill owner).

A Story of Origins

The Pundi temple has an interesting legend[170] associated with it, which goes as follows.

Toṇṭaivalanāṭu was a forested area. Two hunters lived there – Iṟumban and Pūṇḍan – brothers. One day they saw a creeper (vaḷḷi) growing around an ant hill (?); they struck it with an arrow. Milk began to ooze from there. They saw an image (of ādinātha) there which they started to propitiate with flowers, etc. They prayed to the image everyday. One day in the forest they came across a Jaina monk and finding the image they propitiated similar to him in appearance asked him who he was. They showed him the image of the tīrthankara. With his divine wisdom (jñāna dṛṣṭi) he told them in the past when the Jaina temples were destroyed the image was also thrown out and lay under the ant-hill for long. When the hunters' arrow struck the chest of the image it poured forth milk. The Jaina monk said he would sit on a fast there until a temple was built to place the image in.

Around this time a ruler in Paṭavēṭu, Nandirājā – whose daughter had been possessed by a spirit (pēy) – had issued a command that whosoever released her from the pēy would be gifted with half his kingdom and his daughter in marriage. The Jaina mendicant ordered the hunters to go to the king and do the needful. The moment they would set eyes on the princess she would be freed from the pēy. And the pēy would come rushing to the mendicant. The hunters did as told and the *pēy* went to the mendicant and asked him to give her a command as to what she should do. He ordered her to keep a vigil over the place. The princess thus freed went to seek blessings of the mendicant and offered aṣṭavidāna (eight

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[170] J.Das Jain (compiled) Pūndi Śrī Poṉṉeyilnāthar Jiṉālaya Varalāṟu Ātmabāvaṉaiyum Tūya Naṟcintaṉaiyum (Tamil), Sri Jinabavan Publications, Chennai (based on legends, manuscripts and texts), not dated, p.14

kinds) pūjā to him. The king too went and asked the mendicant to accept half his kingdom and his daughter in marriage. Refusing both the mendicant instead asked for a temple to be built at the place for the Jina image found there. When asked as to where the material to build the temple would come from the mendicant said the material originally meant to be used for a Saraswati temple should be used on this. The princess was given diksa as a nun. The temple was constructed in seven days. Apart from the tīrthankara, images of Brahmadevar yakṣa and Kūṣmāṇḍini yakṣi were installed in separate shrines for each, while the tīrthankara (Pārśvanātha) was installed in a central shrine within the temple complex. The king also built 16 pillars maṇṭapam, a maṭapaḷḷi, a 1000-pillared maṇṭapam, chatram, munivāsam, 7 tanks, gopurams, tanks etc.....[171]

The boundaries of the temple were thus – to the east Kaṇikiḻuppu, to the south – Paiyyūr, Āraṇi; to the west – Chevūr, Mayana Kuṇḍukaḷ, Rattinamaṅkalam; to the north – Aṭaṉūr, Aḍaiyapulam.[172]

The two hunters Iṟumban and Pūṇḍan were granted the following boons – that they would remain immortal, and live on in people's memory on account of the two villages to be named after them, Pūṇḍi and Iṟumbeḍu (still existing). The two villages would forever have a rich harvest of sugarcane, karuṇai (a type of yam), turmeric...as long as the sun and moon live....[173]

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[171] Ibid, p.15
[172] Ibid, p.16-17
[173] Ibid, p.17

Inscriptional History

* On west wall of Jaina temple of Ponninātha. Chōḷa King Sambuvarāya [174]

1st paragraph - (Ciraparuḷi-k-korravan / Sambuvarāya) pleased with penance of the (Jaina) muṇi – asks what he wants for the penance; muṇi (says) through his divine vision (*nālattu..*) he wishes that the water of Jayaṅkoṇḍachōḷamaṇḍalam be made use of for purposes of Pūṇḍi of Palkunrattukōṭṭam in Meyūrnāḍu.

2nd para - Hence to spread wisdom (*ara-neri*) the king, for the Jinavaraṉ (muṇi) spread the message (commanded) that temple (he built be hailed) as Vīravīrajinālayam, earned praise (and that the muṇi, residing there, spread the good knowledge, nallaram).

3rd para- As boundary of this nagaram (Pūṇḍi) (was declared) west of Kaṇiyiluppai, boundary of Narpākkam, at north west, Porunarkunru, Pūnal river (north of) north east of Kulamali-kuṇḍigai; on east (of) Ādittamaṅgalam; Irumpunrapoykai (pond); border of Meyūr; south-east border

4th para - ...Cīrmarayoratai (border of) land – south; border of this ūr (Iḷakaṉ pēyar ellai) (Ivvatanūr) to place boundary stones in these corners (as given to the temple)...boundaries in all 8 directions (en-disai). The inscription also mentions (cultivation of / produce) paddy (vari); ginger, mantāram (flowers), sugarcane, and other crops (perhaps to be grown; or produce of which to be utilised for the temple). For his fame the record (to be made) on stone and copper plates.

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[174] SII Vol VII, No. 62; ARE 58 of 1900

The above inscription interestingly corresponds to the story about Pūṇḍi. Moreover, the legend also mentions that Pūṇḍi, Iṟumbēḍu would be full of bountiful crops, of the nature that is mentioned in the inscription.

* 13th-14th century characters, Vīravīra Sambhuvarāya of the latter dynasty's time[175]

Records building of a Jaina temple called Vīravīrajinālaya, named after the chieftain, and the gift of a village to it. The lands belonging to the temple were marked Kuṇḍikaikaḷ (means boundary stones) marked with a kamaṇḍala, a jina symbol, water pot). Pūṇḍi is stated to be a village in Meyyūrnāḍu in Paḻkuṉṟakōṭṭam.

Tachur

Padmendiran, Tamil Maran, Kanchanamala, Nirmal Kumar, N. Raja Kumari, Ramesh Kumar, Sanjeeva Kumar, Anuradha, Padmaprabha were among those who spoke to me.

Odalavadi (near Tachur)

40 – 45 households; 90 per cent of these are agriculturists. Here Cīvakacintāmaṇi has been recited by one family for more than 3 generations.

"Ōdalavadi in Polur taluk owns a shrine dedicated to the Arhat. The central image herein, made of granite, and is depicted as seated in the meditative pose with the palms joined over the lap. An inscription in the shrine referring itself to the reign of the Pāṇḍya king Kuḷaśekhara I (circa 13th century AD) registers an endowment of land to the deity

175 Ekambaranathan, 1987, p.248. Emphasis mine.

by a private person. In this record the deity is referred to by the epithet 'Aniyād-aḻakiyar' which means 'He who is beautiful without adornment.' Now Bāhubali, the younger son of the first tīrthankara is considered as endowed with natural beauty par excellence and the image of Gommaṭeśvara at Śravaṇabeḷgoḷa, which represents the former, is described as supremely beautiful. From this we are persuaded to think that the presiding deity in the temple at Odalavadi is in all probability Bāhubali or Gommaṭanātha." [176]

* South base of central shrine in Jaina temple[177]

13th century (1271 AD) (in the 3rd regnal year, of Tribhuvanacakravartin Kulaśekharadeva, Pāṇḍya)

Gift of tax free land as paḷḷiccandam by Ōdalanśōḻan Mūrtiyāḻvār, of Ōdalapāḍi, after purchasing it from the ūravar of the village to the Jaina temple of Nāyanār Aniyādaḻagiyar (one who does not wear clothes). [178]

* AR 144 of 1941-42

Record of a gift by the nāṭṭavar of Murugamaṅgalapaṟṟi for worship and cloth to the deity

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[176] P.B.Desai, Jainism in South India and Some Jaina Epigraphs, Jaina Samskriti Samrakshaka Sangh, Sholapur, 1957; p. 95

[177] AR 142 of 1941-42. Emphasis mine.

[178] Ekambaranathan, p.240. Emphasis mine.

Arpakkam

D. Jayakumar (arcaka), T. Rajagopalan (self taught, independent scholar, runs a library of his own collections of books on Buddhism and Jainism, largely) were people one interacted with. This place does not have Tamil Jaina families. The Arcaka stays there, to conduct worship in a modern temple built by the Tamil Jainas there, right opposite the library mentioned here. Rajagopalan's library is named, interestingly, S.S. Arunagirinathar library. He guided me to Magaral ('Vīracholiyam' of Buddhist texts, he informed). Rajagopalan says Arpakkam and Magaral were once Buddhist and Jaina settlements. This has been mentioned by many scholars too. One noticed Mahāvīra's statue outside the (now Śaiva) temple, mutilated; as also Buddha's. Rajagopalan says Ādikesavaperumāḷ temple was a Buddhist temple converted into a Vaiṣṇava temple. He informed that at Palur (en-route Chinglepet from Walajapet) a Mahāvīra statue was found in a lake.

At Magaral, there is a locally reputed Viṟṟurinda Perumāḷ temple, and a Perumālkoil at Arpakkam, with Venkatāchalapati's idol in sanctum sanctorum. A Jaina tīrthaṅkara at some point, is what Rajagopalan[179] believes. One part of this temple has a room, dilapidated, not cared for, with broken pillars and broken images.

Gñānasampantar is believed to have sung the tevāram hymns at Magaral at the Tirumagaral (Īśvarar) koil. Was it a Jaina temple converted?

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[179] Interestingly, Rajagopalan belongs to the Śaiva veḷḷāḷar community. When he took me to his relative's house, one could see, at the threshold of this old typical tiled-roof home, patterns and motifs that seemed very similar to the entrances of the Tamil Jaina homes. Or was one looking for similarities, having heard so many of the nīr-pūci nayiṉār stories?

Tiruppanamur / Tirupparambur, Cheyyar taluk, (earlier Tirupparambur-Karandai part of the same village)[180]

Community

Aruhakirti, Kasturi, S.Bahubali, P. Adivasan were among those one spoke to. This was, strangely, a village full of the elderly, mostly retired teachers. Only 30 people (15 households). Some years back, there were 60 families here, around 200 people. Sudharma Sagar of this village took vatakkiruttal (sallekhana is referred to here as vatakkiruttal, as in old Tamil records) near Nasik. P. Adivasan's grandfather Dharmasagar also took vaṭakkiruttal; Gajapathi Sagara from the same village also took sallekhana viratam.

And one was told that was the importance of this village – to have seen three such great men in this (modern) context, something that is considered rare today. In Tamilnadu nobody had taken vaṭakkirtuttal for years now (especially a householder).

"We do not ask boons (worldly) from tīrthankaras. Pañca parameṣṭis are important for us. Sādhus, ācāryas, upādhyāya are our 'gods' (deivam), none others. During Kalabrā times many Jaina munis used to visit (villages in these parts). Around Madurai you can see so many rock-cut caves and caverns prepared for their stay.

Story of Akaḷañka and the Buddhist debate

"Akaḷañka hailed from here. Buddhists used to live here close by. Akaḷañka was from this area. He had a debate with the Buddhists. For ten days the debate went on, he kept losing. In despair he hit his head against a stone, and yakṣi

[180] Jeevabandhu T. S. Sripal hailed from this village

Dharumadevi appeared and told him – 'tomorrow ask the person who asks you the fist question, to repeat the question again. There is a goddess who is helping them, seated in an urn / pot (kalaśam)'. He did as told. And won the debate. The Buddhists who lost decided to leave the place.
There is a Śiva temple here in this village, a very old. Tirumāl koil. A Buddha image was here, which is now in the museum. People (from different communities) used to co-exist here in this village.[181]

At one point there were around 2000 families in this village. Today Jaina households are 25.

Jeevabandhu Sripal belonged to this village. He was part of the Jeevarakshaka Sabhai he used to go to each village, campaigning.

Sacred 'circulatory' space

We go to Arpakkam, Tirnaruṉgoṇḍai, few to Tiruparuttikuṉṟam – but no worship is offered in Tiruparuttikuṉṟam (under ASI now). So we do not offer worship there.

Illarattār's duty is to think of tīrthankara and go to temple first thing in the morning, or read texts everyday. 400 years ago, agriculturists from nearby villages used to go to temple at Karandai and then go to fields. But since by the time they reached the fields it would be late, we constructed a small temple in Tirupparambur.

Worship, rituals, festivals

[181] This is about the only village where one got to hear this statement.

We do *tappa tiruviḻā* in *Māci māsam* (Feb-March); no Jaina temples have a tank in Tamilnadu. This temple in Karandai has it. We conduct teppatiruvila here, when the procession deity is taken around the tank and brought back.

We all celebrate navarātri, Vijayadaśami. Svādhyāyam (self learning) is important to the Jaina householder. Many have manuscripts, books, in Prākrit (Prākrutam), Sanskrit (Samskrutam), Maṇipravāḷam and Tamil. Families bring out texts every festival. Śrīpurāṇam is important. From Sanskrit it was translated into Hindi and Tamil. We cannot read Maṇipravāḷam. Vardhamāna Patippakam brought out these in abridged versions in Tamil. Some protected and preserved palm leaf manuscripts.

If they complete the full recitation of Cīvakacintāmaṇi in a house they celebrate with a feast. But that is no longer done. U.Ve. Swaminatha Aiyer saw such a celebration, it is said. In a Jaina Chettiar's house.[182] He preserved and brought it out.

Our library has good books. (Dharmasagar library [183]). Illaṟaneṟi, Maṇipravālam Gomaṭasāram, are among the texts in our library. And some handwritten manuscripts too. Ṛṣabha had two daughters; he teaches one literature and another, mathematics. Hence education is important to us.

Those dependent on agriculture (mostly paddy) are in very bad state now. Some are giving up agriculture too. Dryland here; most Jainas got punjai land; and very few have nanjai (wet land) lands. For the temple (Karandai) there is some

[182] Refer to the chapter (II) where mention is made of how U.Ve. Ca came across Cīvakacintāmaṇi in Kumbakonam. He was given a handwritten manuscript by a Mutaliar / Chettiar

[183] Set up by Sripal originally in the 1930s.

land based income or we support with donations. During the ten-day festival each village takes up charge of it each day. Then there are daily worship; milk abhiśekam, sandal abiśekam and water.

Alagramam, Cittamur, Tirnarungondai are places where all Tamil Jainas gather. Karandai – people take vows; decorate yakṣa with sandal 'kāppu.' People working for us would call us 'āṇḍai' (the way they say mutalāli, and so on).

Caste surnames

Some started using Mutaliyar, Chettiar, and so forth, instead of 'nayiṉār' in the face of persecution. Just to avoid persecution.

Inscriptional History

Karandai – Nannul author, Pavanandi's village (North Arcot)

Mr. Appandai gave me the above information.

The temple here has one of the most exquisitely carved idol of Dharmadevi (in green colour) – the yakṣi who helped Akaḷaṅka in his debate and since then she is held to be a very powerful, boon giving goddess, by the people. The temple is also very beautifully built.

"This temple is also called Kuntunāthar Jinālaya and is 1200 years old. 18 kms from Kāñcipuram. It was called Tirupparambūr-Karandai in the past. Today the southern part is called Karandai and the northern Tiruparamabur.They are now separate villages. A temple to the 17th tīrthaṅkara in Karandai (Kuntunāthar) is called Munigiri Jinālayam. Legend says that in the past there were hillocks surrounding this

place where Jaina monks meditated, hence the name Muṇigiri. No hillocks seen today only a few boulders."[184]

"The temple complex has a central shrine to Kundunāthar, Mahāvīra to the south, Ādināthar to the north, Dharmadevi yakṣi shrines as subsidiary shrines. Apart from the central shrine others are of later periods. In all 17 inscriptions (were found in) this temple. From 9th to 19th century AD. The 1st of Nandivarmaṉ III, the Pallava ruler (2 of his inscriptions here) records his victory over the Chola ruler in Tellar. "*Tellār erinta Nandivarmaṉ*" (8 miles south west of Vandavāsi is Tellār – a Jaina temple there).In the 11th century it was called Virarājendra Perumpaḷḷi. After the Chōḷa ruler. The Pārśva image came up in this time. In the 5th regnal year of Vīrarajēndra (1068) 3 villagers sold some land with tax for the temple as tiruviḻāppuram (expenses for festivals in this temple). Karandai was part of Tirukāmakkōṭṭam (ARE 129 of 1939-40).

In the 45th regnal year of 1st Kuḷōttuṅka Chōḻa (1115 AD) Tirupparambūr villagers sold some lands to give as paḷḷivaḷākam for the Tirukāṭṭāmpaḷḷi āḻvār Mahāvīra temple. (ARE 141 of 1939-40). Tirupparambūr was the ciṟṟūr (small) of Tirukāmakōttappuram; part of Kaḷiyūrkōṭṭam and Kaliyūrnāḍu of Jayaṅkoṇḍachōḻamaṇḍalam (ARE 129 of 1939-40). In Kuḷōttuṅga's time Karandai was known as Tirupparambūr and the ciṟṟūr of Tirukāmakkoṭṭam. In the 12th century AD – a resident of Tirupparambūr called Tūkiḷikiḻāṉ Aṟṟiyanuḍaiayār donated some sheep and goats for the temple. Rāja Rāja Chōḻa III (1216-1256 AD) period came many grants. In his 10th regnal year (1226 AD) the Pārśva

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184 A. Ekambaranathan, Śrī Muṇigiri (Karandai) Digambara Jaina Tiruttala Varalāru (Tamil), Tiruppanikkulu, Sri Munigiri Digambara Jinalayam, Karandai, 1991

shrine (*tirumeṟṟisai perumāḷ*) got offering of 300 kāśu for lighting the perpetual lamp. Tirukāmakōṭṭapuram was made part of Veṉkuṉṟakōṭṭam (part of Ilaṅkāṭu division) Karandai was made a bigger village. [185]

In the 10[th] regnal year of Rāja Rāja III (1226 AD) a veḷḷāḷa of Uṟṟukōṭṭai village (a village near modern Walajapet) donated cows; ghee from the cows to be used for perpetual lamp for the temple. [186]

In 1270 AD, a Poṉṉūr resident, Aṟuvāṇṭai Āṇṭāḷ Tirucoṟṟutturai Uṭaiyār, gave some donation to the temple of 3 palavaṉṉamāṭai and some paddy for burning 6 lamps every day in the evening and night time. For 3 hours (oṟu jāmam) [187]

"In 1510 AD during Kriṣṇadevarāya rule, temples in this part, including the Vīrarajēndraperumpaḷḷi, at Karandai benefitted from the sarvamāṇyam (tax free) to paḷḷicandam and Jaina and Buddhist devadāna lands" [188]

A 15[th] century Puṣpadanta tīrthankara temple at Tirupparambūr. Recently addition made with footprints of three residents of Tirupparambūr (who took vaṭakkiruttal) Sudharmasāgar, Gajapati Sāgar and Dharmsagar made here.Dates of their attaining moksa mentioned. "Dharmasagar lived a true Jaina life, became a renouncer, went to Śravaṇabelgoḷa and attained mokṣa. His son, Sudharmasāgar was born (avattarittār) in 1932, was a Tamil and Sanskrit scholar, steeped in Jaina philosophy. In 1973 he attained

[185] Munigiri Śri Kunthunāthar aṣṭakam, p.16
[186] ARE 132 of 1939-40
[187] ARE 138 of 1939-40
[188] Ekambaranathan, Śrī Muṇigiri (Karandai) Digambara Jaina Tiruttala Varaḷāru, p.29 and; ARE 144 of 1939-40

mokṣa at Gajabanda in Maharashtra. Their sallekhana is commemorated here. Gajapati Jain, Gajapati Sagar, known as tattuva kaṭaḷ (ocean of knowledge / philosophy?) became a monk, (munivratam), took sallekhana vrutam and attained mokṣa on 3rd November 1988." [189]

Akaḷaṅka Ācārya - the Goddess of Karandai is said to have assisted him in defeating in debate the Buddhist teacher Himaśītala at Kāñcipuram.[190]

One has noted that the community at Tirupparambur believes Ācārya Akaḷanka was a local from these parts and that the debate with the Buddhists happened around Tirupparambūr-Karandai. Apparently these parts were once settled by the Buddhists as well, who, according to the Tamil Jainas, migrated when they lost in the debate. The idea of a sect leaving the place in case of losing a debate seems important to the Jainas. We saw this in Cittamur where the brahmins left the place after losing out in a debate to the Jainas.

There is a song to Dharmadevi of Karandai temple which refers to the deity as the one of green colour (paccai niṟattavaḷē) who helped Akaḷaṅka defeat the Buddhists of bad thoughts / deeds (tī viṉai puttar)....

"aṟamē viḷanka akaḷaṅka māmuniyaṉ
piniṉṟutirumaṟu koṇṭa
tīvinai puttar cayittavaḷē
niramāna paccai nirattavaḷē..." [191]

[189] Ibid, pp35-36
[190] Ibid, p.16, referring to the Mackenzie manuscripts, No. 14, Sec.3
[191] Ibid, p.61

There is the Akaḷanka maṇṭapam on the shore of the tank of the temple[192] built 150 years ago, and foot impressions on stone, which are offered worship during festivals.

"Nemidatta in his Ārādhanakathākośa relates this story – Purśōttama, minister of king Subhādatta of Manyakheṭa had two sons, Akaḷaṅka and Nishkaḷaṅka. When they grew of age, their parents wanted to see them married, but they desired to obtain knowledge. They were sent to a nearby Buddhist monastery and were initiated into studies. When the teacher one day taught them a Jaina text he found the version spurious but failed to correct it. Akaḷaṅka found the correct version and helped him. The teacher suspected the brothers to be Jainas and found added proofs. They were turned out and the king sent (his) soldiers to apprehend the culprits and punish them. Akaḷaṅka hid himself among lotus stalks but Nishkaḷaṅkawas caught and beheaded. Akaḷaṅka reached Kaliṅga. Himaśītala king of Ratnasañcayapura (a Buddhist whose wife was a Jaina). (In a debate between) Buddhists and Jainas Akaḷaṅka could not win for many days. He was told by the yakṣi Padmāvati that the Buddhists were invincible as yakṣi Tārā remained hidden in a pot behind a curtain and was helping them. Next day Akaḷaṅka broke the pot and Buddhists were made to surrender (Śravaṇabeḷgoḷa inscription 77)."[193]

The 1st inscription in this complex belongs to the time of Pallava Nandivarma III (AD 846 – 869). It was built in his time. And has been renovated in different times later. It was renovated in 11th century AD. There is an inscription of the time of Chōḻa Vīra Rājendra (1063 -69 AD) here. So it was

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[192] Ibid, p.17

[193] P.M.Joseph, Jainism in South India, The International School of Dravidian Linguistics, Tiruvananthapuram, 1997, p. 98

called Vīra Rājendra Perumpaḷḷi. Mēṟṟisai Perumāḷ (Pārśvanātha as referred to in the inscriptions) sanctorum has Pārśvanātha's image. The inscription dated 1156 AD mentions 300 kāśu for lighting lamp for this deity.[194]

The Mahāvira shrine, a separate one within the complex is dated in the 12th century AD. This shrine was called Tirukāṭṭāmpaḷḷi and the deity Tirukāṭāmpaḷḷi āḻvār. [195]

Some more additions and alterations were made in the 15th century and 16th century.

Interestingly, Ekambaranathan dates the Dharmadevi shrine to the 15th – 16th century. But Akalaṅka ācārya (and the story associated to the debate with the Buddhists) are from a much early period. This might be an instance of a mythology built around the shrine to give it the sanctity of association with one of the more promient and influential acaryas of Jaina religion. The Dharmadevi – in green as mentioned – is shown seated on a lion.There is a small image of Akalaṅka ācārya, too. Note that placing image of ācāryas may be a later addition, perhaps influenced by the same practice in placing the images of the Śaiva bards in temple complexes (which may also have been a later addition in that context).

Inscriptional History[196]

* On the inner wall of the gopura right on the entrance of Kuntunāthar jinālaya.[197]

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[194] ARE 141 of 1939-40

[195] ARE 135 of 1939-40; Ekambaranathan, op.cit

[196] A. Ekambaranathan, C.K.Sivaprakasam, 1987, all inscriptions, unless otherwise quoted, from pp.215 – 230 of said book Not referring to al the inscriptions here. Only those that are of significance.

[197] Ibid; also see ARE, 140 of 1939-40

Pallava times, Nandivarman III (846-869 AD), in Tamil Contains three verses praising Pallavarkon who fought at Tellāru and imprisoned valava (the chola king); ARE 141 also mentions king, and political exploits of Āndivarman and not his contribution to the Jaina temple.

* 1068 AD. (11th century)[198]

Records sale of land made tax free, by three members of the assembly (ur) as tiruvilappuram, to the Jaina temple at Karantai, a hamlet of Trikkamākottupuram.

Note: The donation here is made by the assembly - sale of land tax- free – and not the king.

* 1115 AD, 45th regnal year of Kulōttuṅga chōla I, Vardhamāna shrine.[199]

Records sale of land as Pallivilāgam by the assembly situated in Kāliyūrnādu, a sub- division of Kāliyūrkōttam, a district of Jayaṅkondacholamandalam, to the temple of Tirukāttampalli-ālvār in the village.

* Chola Rājarājadeva[200]

Records agreement given by Kaniyālam of the temple to burn twilight lamp for 300 kasu received.

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198 AR 129 of 1939-40. Emphasis and note mine.

199 Ekambaranathan, op.cit, No.282; also AR 135 of 1939-40

200 Ibid, No.283; 141 of 1939-40

Note: Does not say received from whom

* Chōḻa Rājarājadeva[201]
Records gift of cows by a veḷḷāḷa of ūṟṟukkāḍu in ūṟṟukkāṭṭu-kkōṭṭam, district of jayaṅkoṇḍachōḻamaṇḍalam for perpetual lamp

* Ibid, No.285; ARE 131 of 1939-40

Gives a list of lamps endowed by the nagarattār of Arumoḻidevapuram, a nagara in Paṇaiyūrnāḍu, a subdivision of Rājarājavalanāḍu, for burning *tiruppaḷḷiyeḻucchi* (dawn) lamp at Jaina temple of Vīrarājendra perumpaḷḷi at Tirupparambūr.

* ARE 130 of 1939-40

13th century AD characters

Gift of sheep for perpetual lamp, by Tugiḷikiḻāṉ-Aṟaiyaṉ Uḍaiyaṉ of Parambūr in Kāḷiyūrnāḍu, a sub division of Kāḷiyūrnāḍu.

* AR of 138 of 1939-40

1270 AD

Gift of three coins and paddy of aṟuvantai āṇṭāḷ tiruchoṟṟutturai uḍaiyār of poṉṉūr for burning six twilight lamps for one jāmam – 3 hours.

[201] Ibid, No.284; ARE 132 of 1939-40

In 1510 AD (AR 144 of 1939-40) Rāmappa Nāyaka (the Mugappāvāḍai officer of Narasimharāya, levied *joḍi* tax on temple lands, and many temples were neglected, and that Krishnadevarāya on accession to the throne made all devadāna lands sarvamānya (tax free) including Jaina and Buddhist temples in Paḍaivīḍu-rājya and Chandragrii rājya, and this benefitted the Karandai temple.

* 16th century AD (AR 145 of 1939-40). Invocation to Sāmantabhadra, teacher of Puṣpasenā Yogīndra (a śrāvaka?)

* In 1747 AD, one Agastiappa Nāyinār renovated the gôpuram (AR 136 of 1939-40)

* 745 AD (AR 219 of 1968-69)

Gift of seven kaḷañju gold by Iḷayārappanandi[202] for feeding the Jaina ascetics who were not in regular establishment of the paḷḷi. Gift entrusted to villager who agreed to look after endowment and pay one uḻakku rice for one kalañju per day.

Vandavasi (Wandiwash of the colonial times), North Arcot

150 families here. A population of around 700 – 1000, by far seemed the largest concentration I had seen. Educated, employed mostly. People gather every Friday evening (I meet them too, on a Friday evening) at the temple here. I attend the evening prayers. Everyone asks me to pay a visit to Ponnūrmalai, the important Jaina sacred centre which is still a pilgrimage place today.

[202] Name of donor also read as Āṇḍai Iḷaiyār pavanandi (Chakravarti, Jaina Literature in Tamil and Some Jaina Epigraphs, Bharatiya Jnanpitha Publications, New Delhi, first revised edition, 1974 (originally published in Arrah, 1941), App I, p.147

Inscriptional History

Ponnur, Wandiwash (Vandavasi), North Arcot [203]

* 1256 AD (7th regnal year of Māravarmaṉ Vikarama Pāṇḍya)[204]
(Ādinātha temple)
Records that the nattavar of Viḍālpaṟṟu assigned taxes payable by those settling in the paḷḷi vilāgam of Ādinātha, to provide for worship and repairs.

* 1733 AD (Adinatha temple)[205]
Jainas of Svarṇapura [206] Kaṇakagiri should take images of Pārśvanātha and Jvālāmālini ammaṉ from temple of Ādīśvara every Sunday to Nīlagiriparvata situated to north west of temple at the time of the weekly worship of Heḷācārya.

"Svarṇapura is evidently identical with Poṉṉūr. The Nīlagiri Hill which also figures in the legend of Heḷāchārya has still retained the name, being three miles away from Poṉṉūr. The icons of Pārśvanātha and Jvālāmalini mentioned in the epigraph are probably the metallic images preserved in the temple of Ādinātha to the present day or their earlier substitute....The specific mention of Javālāmālini alongside of Pārśvanātha in the inscription is noteworthy; for the former was originally the Yakṣi or the attendant deity of Chandraprabha Tīrthaṅkara and attained unusual importance in later times. Judging from the earlier Jaina inscriptions found here and the tradition connecting it with Heḷāchārya

[203] Ekambaranathan, 1987, pp.243-246, unless otherwise mentioned

[204] Ibid. Also see AR 415 of 1928-29

[205] Ibid. Also AR 416 1928-29. Emphasis and note, wherever, mine

[206] Sanskrit name of Poṉṉūr, Ep.Ind, vol XXIX, p.199 ff. Heḷācārya monk of Drāviḍa gaṇa, native of Hemagrāma, Poṉṉūr. Heḷāchārya's feet carved on Nīlagiri hill, north west of the Jaina temple

Ponnūr appears to have been a renowned stronghold of Jainism from earlier times." [207]

Note: This is the first time that a ritual associated with Eḷācārya is mentioned in inscriptional records in these parts. The Tamil Jainas (at Vandavasi) informed me they were planning to revive this tradition which had stopped many years ago.

Ponnūrmalai - Śri Viśākhācārya Taponilayam

Last nirgrantha muṇi (so far, at present) of Tamilnadu, originally a resident of Erumbur (South Arcot?), Subhadrasàgar muni was resident at this taponilayam, a modern structure. He was very old and could not talk, as he was rather unwell when I saw him.

One met Siva Adinath, a scholar, celibate (not monk) at the Taponilayam. He has published numerous books on Jaina thought and the way of the Jina. He informs that mathas came in much later in Jainism, and that the concept was taken from Hinduism. He said since the last 400 years or so the link between the community and the ascetics has changed. More ascetics are moving north he says. And he reasons that the 'unfavourable' conditions for them from other communities, from Hinduism and the brief Muslim rule in Tamilnadu affected the Jaina (Digambara) ascetic tradition in Tamilnadu and its contact with the community. For him no 'real / true Jainism' exists in the present.

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[207] P.B.Desai, "Two Jaina Inscriptions in Tamil", Ep.Ind XXIX, p. 202

General Reflections: Worship and Rituals

At Melcittamur and elsewhere, generally women knew how to define their rituals in opposition to / contrast to brahminical (Hindu) religion and folk religion. Even where there were obvious influences of a dominant religious culture. Perhaps one needs to look at a larger 'Tamil peasant cultural complex' – celebration of Pongal, the *tēr* (chariot), *kārttikai* (of course with Tamil Jaina meanings and associations), mother goddess worship (various arguments were given as to why there is goddess worship in sravaka dharma despite opposition by a few of their own teachers to this kind of worship). Example was given of a Jaina monk called Arjivasagar (from the 'north' / *vaṭaku*) who had (in one of his yearly tours, in recent times) opposed these rituals and asked the Jainas to discontinue and dispense with what he believed were 'pagan' influences of brāhmiṇism. Within the Tamil Jainas there is a small section that follows his strictures. Others do not.

The Tamil Jainas as a Peasant / Agrarian Society and Problems of Perspective with Inscriptional Records

"In Karashima's view the Chola state during the early 11th and early 12th centuries AD represented the height of (the) earliest efforts to establish an imperial administration that was neither 'segmentary' nor 'feudal'. In contrast to Stein's initial focus on brahmadēya, Karashima's scholarship had addressed landholding in communities that were dominated by non brāhmaṇs (non brahmadēya villages)...that common landholding patterns in these non brāhmaṇ village clusters evolved into private ownership – non labouring large

landholders eventually displaced the old corporate communities of peasant cultivators..."[208]

In the context of Jaina peasantry (Veḷḷāḷas most of them) and their own conversion story, and the *nīr pūci nayiṉārs*, it may not necessarily have been only a religious conflict. There were economic reasons for the shift – power, resources, bhakti – integration of bhakti to this process.
"Coincidentally, class distinction made their presence felt between and among members of the peasant order. By the 14th century social unrest, compounded by dynastic conflict, pitted the landlords against their peasant cultivators, artisans, and merchants.... Karashima uses inscriptional evidence to show titles held by "those who submitted to Chola sovereignty. By their acceptance of a personal title the elite acknowledged their position in the Chola state system; Chola monarchs reciprocally confirmed local authority. Royal land grants initiatives assisted the process, wherein the state's redistribution of its resources concentrated wealth among supportive notables, temples, learned brāhmaṇas..."[209]

Where do the Jaina inscriptions, and thereby community, figure in this understanding is a question that needs to be addressed. For instance, where would we place the social conflict – between the landed Tamil Jainas and non Jaina landed communities, if one were to see it beyond the question of religious persecution?

[208] Kenneth Hall, "Structural Change and Societal Integration in Early South India: an Introductory Essay" in Kenneth R. Hall, ed, Structure and Society in Early South India: Essays in Honour of Noboru Karashima, OUP, New Delhi, 2001
(pp. 1-27); p.4

[209] Ibid, p.4

Further, "In early south Indian inscriptions Pallava and early Chola monarchs assume an instrumental role as patrons of brahmadeyas which are believed to have been pivotal agents in the creation of the tank agricultural networks. Or did the indigenous society itself engender these developments as is the case of the non- brāhmaṇ dominant irrigation agriculture communities that coincidentally came into existence?"[210]This remains a question alone, whereas- "In both South Indian and Javanese societies, the temples, their priests and their professional staff became prominent centres and agents for the new agrarian population clusters."[211]

Thus where do the Jaina agrarian communities stand in this process of understanding early / early medieval Tamilnadu through the inscriptions? It is almost as it they do not exist even marginally in these hypotheses which are usually centered on brâhmiṇ-veḷḷāḷa peasant context.

Responding to Stein's earlier hypothesis (in the context of his theory on the 'segmentary state') on emerging brahmadeyas being the 'accurate markers' of most agrarian localities, Champakalakshmi says, "The brahmadēyas should be seen more correctly as extending agriculture into unsettled areas as well as bringing managerial input into existing peasant and / or pastoral settlements, when these were clustered together as brahmadēyas. This is clearly illustrated in the Pallava land grants where both the extension of agriculture into virgin lands and the creation of brahmadēya by bringing existing settlements together are recorded. This practice continued well into the Chōḻa times

[210] Ibid, p.25
[211] Ibid, p.26

until an optimum of such expansion was reached by the 12th century." [212]

There is little to include the Jaina agricultural settlements - and also the fact of settling the brāhmiṇs or brahmadēyas in previously Jaina agrarian contexts (Arpakkam, Magaral in and around Kancipuram, being a few of these) – in all discourse on the agrarian expansion processes in Tamiḻakam. Perhaps these arguments need to be extended to see this community, especially in the context of the Śaiva veḷḷāḷar and Tamil Jaina versions of the story of starting settled agriculture and of their being the 'original', first agriculturists, even if it is part of their 'folklore' The truth remains that a majority of the Tamil Jainas are / have been agriculturists. If seen from this point of view, perhaps a new understanding of the persecution, the nir puci vellala, the Śaiva-Jaina conflict, and other stories would make better sense.[213]

"The newly emerging polities of the early medieval period, adopting the dharmasastra model of kingship introduced the brahmadeya as a legitimating institution but more importantly as means of agrarian expansion and integration. This is nowhere as conspicuously illustrated as in the Tamil region, under the Pallavas through the 9th centuries....(at the same time) the ideological importance of the Dharmaśāstra dictum about the merit secured by making land grants to brāhmaṇas undoubtedly led to the creation of brahmadēyas. South Indian kings appear to have been equally influenced by the Arthaśāstra prescriptions for agrarian expansion. In

[212] R. Champakalakshmi, "Reappraisal of a Brāhmaṇical Institution: the Brahmadēya and its Ramifications in early South India", in Kenneth Hall, ed, op.cit, p.61

[213] Unfortunately, epigraphy and 'folklore'/ story telling traditions, or community narratives are seen as disjointed, disparate elements and analysed as narrow compartments within most scholarship.

doing so, they revived abandoned village sites, populated them by shifting people from their own countries (or inducing 'foreigners' by force?) and settling sudra agriculturists (a certain number of families being specified). The donees were teachers, experts in the Vedas who officiated at ritual sacrifices....South Indian kings especially Pallavas, actually brought brahmanas from the Andhra region; the Cholas shifted many of them to new Brahmadēyas within their core domain and even to the distant Pāṇḍya region following its conquest."[214]

In this context one needs to look at the Jaina inscriptions; where scholarship is relatively silent on comparative evaluation of inscriptions recording land grants to Jainas, and brāhmiṇs, more in terms of how this would render legitimacy of a different kind to the ruler. Also somewhere there is negation of the fact of Jaina agriculturists were present in the same period as when brahmadēyas and agrahāras were being settled. What would be their relationship? What would be the potential for conflict here? We also know that there was royal patronage (as also patronage from richer classes and others) for Jaina institutions (one has touched on this point earlier).

For instance, "Among kings patronising Jainism were the Cera Peruñceraḷāṭan; 6th century – Pallava Simhavarman – a Jaina himself (ruled over Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam – Chenglepattu, north and South Arcot); Mahendravaraman (Jaina) – got made Sittanavāsal and wrote Maṭṭavilāsaprahasanam – condemning other faiths and upholding Jainism.; Chōḻa Rājarāja's sister Kundavai who built the Jaina temple at Tirunaṟuṇgoṇḍai;

[214] R. Champakalakshmi, op.cit, pp 64-65

Kopperuñchōḻan – a Jaina, who took sallekhana vratam; Kūṇ Pāṇḍya who was a Jaina and converted to Śaivism." [215]

Interestingly in many places we have grants by individuals such as those of Karandai which we saw and others noted here. But of course they mention the regnal year of the ruling king in the period when the grant was made. Following Karashima's hypothesis on private ownership – in urs – of land, the other point is that for the Jaina temples, more patronage seems to have come from private individuals and community of Jainas in villages, or some times from other communities (but mostly from Veḷḷāḷars) fulfilling an owe taken (for merit , religious) giving to Jaina establishments than the rulers themselves. Rulers at that point were giving grants to brāhmiṇical establishments. The latter has been studied in greater detail by numerous scholars. And there is rich methodological material available on that as well. Not so, in the case of Jaina inscriptional records.

Donors of grants (to Jaina paḷḷis, including the early cave shelters) included kings, chieftains, feudatories as well as śrāvakas – rich merchants, and perhaps bigger agriculturists... A community was maintaining these sacred centres and institutions of paḷḷis, monks, nuns. In few cases villagers (ūrār) are meant to look after the endowments. The mention of "sin of killing cows on the banks of the Gañga" is also mentioned (as noted in few inscriptional records in this chapter) in many inscriptions.

T.V. Mahalingam points out, that there were "Donors of many kinds; Brāhmi inscriptions at Mamandur (north Arcot)

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[215] Mallinatha Sastry, Tamilnadu kā Jain Itihās (Hindi), Kundakunda Bharati, Delhi, 1995, p.131-2

– local chieftain Kaṇimāṉ held sway over a small principality around Mamandur, around 3rd – 4th century AD – dedicated a cave to Jain monks and at his instance the stone mason Chōḻavaṉ (Ciṟuvaṉ) cut the drip ledge on the upper part of the cave..."[216]

There have been numerous Jaina settlements, which have been referred to in the inscriptions. "Settlements of Jaina community – referred to in epigraphs (are at) Madurai, Vellarai, Tondi, Ponai, Potalai, Tidiyal, Elaiyur, Venpalli, Nagaperur (Nagamalai), Patimu, Nelveli, Nalliyur, Karur, Yarrur (Arrur), Pakanur, Kunrattur."[217] Hence there was an active agrarian context to the Tamil Jainas and perhaps the peasant society, agrarian expansion (or otherwise) discourse needs to look closer at these.

All inscriptions – most of them have the agrarian element in them, or are oriented towards it. They mention the villages, harvest, crops; oriented towards an agrarian community of the Tamil Jainas. They mention boundaries, four directions (in Tirunarungondai there are many grants of nañjai and puñjai – wet and dry land). While in most inscriptions elsewhere, there is more of the puñjai nilam. Or there are inscriptions where individuals are donating produce, sheep, etc, to the temple, palli, or for feeding of ācāryas, etc and worship.

Leslie Orr points out, "Jain institutions were also involved in agrarian matters, as revealed by references to land transactions and irrigation works in the Jain inscriptions. Of

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[216] T.V. Mahalingam, South Indian Paleaography, pp.288-89); see also p.32. A. Ekambaranathan, 'Early Jaina Vestiges in Tamilnadu', Arhat Vacana, Vol 2 (1), December 1989; (pp. 29-35) - p.33

[217] I. V. Mahadevan, Corpus of Tamil Brāhmi Inscriptions, pp.4-12

the 24 inscriptions with "secular" content (that she has looked at)...12 inscriptions refer to land transactions and 8 to the construction of tanks or irrigation works. The contrast presented by Stein and other authors between Jainism as urban and merchant-supported and Hinduism as rural and peasant-supported is not borne out by the inscriptional evidence.....Jainism was not, through most of this (medieval) period, a marginal religious phenomenon that existed only in a few urban islands or in isolated hill sites, but was instead, well-rooted throughout the Tamil countryside.." [218]

Orr's study, or course, does not dwell too much on agrarianism beyond this statement. However, her study is important in that she uses inscriptional evidence to seek the 'centrality' of worship, as she terms it, and the significance of the 'sensual' element in the yaksi worship in medieval Tamil Jainism.

She says, "Jaina activities in medieval Tamilnadu appear to be firmly centered on worship. There are 369 Tamil inscriptions that date form the period of the 5th to 13th centuries and can be considered, on eth basis of their contents of find-spots, to be "Jain". Of these 236, or two thirds give evidence of worship activities..." [219]

She categorises "variety of worship activities with which medieval Jains were concerned into four types: (a) the setting up of images of Tīrthankaras, yakṣis, yakṣas, and preceptors; (b).the construction and renovation of shrines for images; (c) the establishment of lamps before images;

[218] Leslie C. Orr, "Jain Worship in Medieval Tamilnadu", in N.K.Wagle and Olle Qvarnström, eds, Approaches to Jaina Studies: Philosophy, Logic, Rituals and Symbols, South Asian Studies Papers, No. 11, University of Toronto, 1999, p. 256. I thank Padmanabh Jaini who made a copy for me and sent it by post all the way from California Berkeley

[219] Ibid, p. 253

and (d) arrangements for worship services (arccanai), bathing, festival observances, or giving food or other offerings to the images." [220]

Further she says, "The centrality of the issue of worship to the Jain inscriptions closely parallels what we find in the records inscribed in Hindu temples....The inscriptions indicate that Jain institutions resembled Hindu ones not only with respect to their highlighting of worship as central activity, but also in terms of the type of worship carried out – not only in terms of the general notion of service to a divine or superior being represented in image form, but also in terms of the specifics of that service, including the offering of lamps and food and the celebration of festivals. Precisely the same vocabulary of worship is used in Jain inscriptions as in Hindu inscriptions: in both Jain and Hindu inscriptions, food offerings are termed amutu or avi, worship is referred to as arccanai and service is termed tiruppani. The offering of lowers is the only type of worship that is commonly found referred to in Hindu inscriptions that is not in evidence in the surviving epigraphical accounts of Jain worship." [221]

Here it must be noted that there are quite a few places where they do not use flowers in worship in the Tamil Jaina temples. In this, and some other senses, there is minimalism to be seen in the worship context in Digambara Jaina temples, at least in the places one has visited.

But some generalisations and inferences she draws, which cannot be validated. For instance – "...When we look at early medieval Tamil literature of the 6th to 10th centuries , we

[220] Ibid, p. 253
[221] Ibid, pp. 254-256

find not only Pattini as a "heterodox" goddess of the south, but also the Buddhist goddess Maṇimekalai and the Jain goddess Nīlakeci. In fact Jain and Buddhist goddesses seem to be more in evidence in this literature than are Hindu goddesses. Here we are presented with a challenge to the validity of the "borrowing hypothesis", which considers that the goddesses of Jainism and Buddhism, being foreign to the essentially ascetic orientation of these traditions, must have their origin in Hinduism." [222]

Never did Nīli of Nīlakeci get deified in the Jaina tradition; as has been noted in the study of Nīlakeci. Similarly, no tradition calls Maṇimekalai a goddess in Tamilnadu. Kaṇṇaki, yes, but not Maṇimekalai!

She has studied inscriptions that mention worship of goddess – 'Hindu' and 'Jain' inscriptions as she classifies them, in Madurai and Melur taluks of Madurai district – "which have a total of 180 Hindu inscriptions, Kuḷattūr taluk in Pudukkottai in Tiruchirapalli district (with 298 Hindu inscriptions), and Tirukkoyilur taluk in South Arcot district (with 793 Hindu inscriptions).All of these study areas are located regions where Jain inscriptions are also found." [223]

Her most important point, however is that "the centrality of worship for the Jain and the Hindu communities in medieval Tamilnadu, and the manner of worship, were virtually identical, and equally "Tamil", in terms of notions of devotion, service, and sensuous worship and with respect to the idea that the divine was immanent and rooted in the Tamil landscape. The centrality of worship, as opposed to ascetic practices, marks off Tamil Jainism from the Jainism

[222] Ibid, 263
[223] Ibid, p. 263

of neighbouring Karanataka, and the very active involvement of members of the Jain religious elite in the establishment of images for worship is a feature that distinguishes Tamil Jainism from the Jainism of virtually the whole of inscriptions from the other two study areas, but that the great bulk of references to goddesses in Hindu inscriptions date from the eleventh and later centuries, particularly the thirteenth century. In the Jain inscriptions, on eth other hand, the earliest reference to goddesses is also in the 8th century, but most of the rest of the references to goddesses are earlier than the 11th century. ...From the 9th through the 12th centuries, a greater proportion of Jain inscriptions than Hindu inscriptions were concerned with goddess worship; ...Jain references to female deities are more numerous in the period of the 8th to 10th centuries – and, looking at the medieval period as a whole, are in large part chronologically prior to those in Hindu inscriptions. In proportional terms, goddesses are more prominent as objects of worship among the Jains than among Hindus up until the 13th century." [224] But she does not go into the context as to why this happened.

Thus she avers that "the increasing prominence of goddesses in Hinduism in the course of the medieval period may be less due to efforts to incorporate indigenous, local traditions than it is to the impact of Jain models, which in some cases would not be local at all, but would like to be linked to a pan-Indian Jain pantheon." [225] Though she adds that this hypothesis needs 'considerable further investigation'.

Her terminology 'Hindu' seem problematic, most certainly for the medieval Tamil context. And though she tries to

[224] Ibid, p. 266. Emphasis mine.
[225] Ibid, p. 266

prove that the goddess worship concept could well be a 'Hindu' borrowing form the 'Jain' model, still she also says, there is need for moving "beyond the essentialist judgments that "this is Jain and that is Hindu" , which is exactly what she has been trying to see in the inscriptions. She also uses only one text as reference for looking at the inscriptions, Ekambaranathan and Sivaprakasham's Topographical List – that one has referred to elsewhere) which may not be in any way close to giving a complete picture for a study of the kind she proposes. For the above text too misses out several details of the inscriptions. She concludes however that "we can appreciate the similarities between Jainism and Hinduism in Tamilnadu and particular "Tamil" flavor of both traditions, as the product of a shared religious culture (that had been developing over the years). It is not surprising therefore that the boundary between what is "Jain" and what is "Hindu" in the religion of Tamilnadu is not always so easy to locate." [226]

And this is where one needs to question – at one point she mentions the limitations of using epigraphical evidence as the benchmark without corresponding use of art historical and other evidences that are not necessarily 'written', but her conclusion of the above kind comes precisely from the inscriptional evidence and nothing else. There is no mention of contextualisation of the very obvious record of social – cultural , economic and other kinds – conflict between what she is seeing as a universal 'Hindu' (as an outside observer, essentially). If there are similarities in worship evidenced in either of the two religious contexts as gauged purely from inscriptional records (that too, only one version of these records), there is no effort on her part to ask the next

[226] Ibid, p. 267

question, 'why'. ..She goes so far as to say, "Cross fertilisation (between Jain and Hindu traditions) rather than competition and conflict – are processes that have shaped the history of Jainism and Hinduism in medieval Tamilnadu." [227]

One need not dwell on this last point here, since the entire work one is now sharing tells quite a different story. The problem with inferences of this nature is that they do not explore the entire picture emerging in the period of study in Tamilnadu. Again, it is not the question of religion alone that these occurrences of goddess worship and patterns are to be located in; as she also says at one place where she does mention agrarian interests. In this connection one wishes to state that if one were to agree with Karashima, for instance, regarding the medieval period in Tamilnadu, and if individual landowners are coming into the picture; we do see donations made by individuals to Jaina paḷḷis and other establishments, or simply for worship, etc; and if in that period the larger influence of a dominant religion, thought, ideology rules the roost, then the donations and grants and nature of ritual patterns too would be influenced. The, instead of 'borrowing', or one religion taking from another may not be a sufficient analysis. It must then be seen through the concept of hegemony and processes that go into creating that hegemony. Which will later become simply the 'normative order'. In this sense, even the extent of grants made by individuals to a set establishments would change with the changing 'normative order; or the larger, dominant mode will prevail over these grants and what is written therein. One has noted elsewhere that though 'Jaina' some inscriptions follow a format – like 'incurring the sin of killing a said number of cows, or brāhmaṇas', in some cases,

[227] Ibid, p. 267

on the banks of the Ganga' which is a format of the dominant and the one prevailing.

P. M. Joseph[228] has studied the 'movement' of Jaina centres through the number of inscriptions discovered. He gives the number of inscriptions found at the places against their date and looks at the shift in the importance of the centres with time.

He shows that in the 2nd and 1st century BC the important centres with a number of inscriptional records (in Brāhmi) were Madurai district 26 inscriptions), Anna district (9), Pudukottai (1), Tirunelveli (1) districts.

In terms of the important centres, but misses out the entire period between 1st century BC to 8th century AD; Jambai, Tondur – 1st and 3rd centuries AD, etc - and other places in South Arcot have inscriptions from these periods.

He turns right after that to the 8th century AD - Chidambaram (97), Madurai (35), North Arcot (5), Pudukottai (4), South Arcot (3), Tirunelveli (3), Chengleput (1), Tanjavur (1); 9th century AD - Anna district (12), North Arcot (9), Pudukottai (7), South Arcot (7), Chengleput (7) 9th century AD, he marks North Arcot (14), South Arcot (14), Chengleput (3), Chidambaranar (3), Madurai (2), Pudukottai (2), Tanjavur (2), Kanyakumari (1); 11th century AD – Chingleput (3), North Arcot (12), South Arcot (1), Madurai (0); Chidambaram (0); 12-13th century AD – Chingleput (11), Dharamapuri (3), North Arcot (13), South Arcot (25), Kanyakumari (1), Madurai (2), Periyar (3), Pudukottai (4); 14th century North Arcot (3), South Arcot

[228] P. M. Joseph Jainism in South India, International School of Dravidian Linguistics, 1997; reference here pp. 74-75

(3), Dharmapuri (2); 15th – 16th century – South Arcot (12), Kanyakumari (9), North Arcot (7), Chingleput (4), Chennai (1), Periyar (1); North Arcot – 84 inscriptions distributed in 20 villages in 8 talukas.

There can be seen deliberate conversions of Jaina temples in to brāhmiṇical ones. The cave temples at Malayadikkurichi, in Tirunelveli district, at Tiirupparankunram in Madurai, were Jaina temples converted into Śaiva temples.

The Anaimalai rock –cut cave temple – "dedicated to Narasimha represents a deliberate Vaiṣṇava excavation under Pāṇḍyas in circa 770.... Instances such as these are numerous and have been recognised at places such as Piḷḷaiyārpaṭṭi, Kuṉṉakkuḍi (Ramanathapuram district), Arittapaṭṭi (Madurai), Nārttamalai and Kuḍumiyamalai (Tirucirapalli district), Tirchirāpaḷḷi itself, Vīraśikhāmaṇi and Kaḻugumalai (Tirunelveli district), Dālavaṉūr (South Arcot district), and Siyāmañgalam and Māmaṇḍūr (North Arcot district). It is only in Sittanavāsal and Pudukkoṭṭai (Tiruchiraplli district) that Jaina vestiges have remarkably survived such vicissitudes. This is a notable Jaina centre which was in continuous occupation of the Jainas from the 2nd century BC to 9th century AD." "The series of Jaina structural stone temples in Tamilnadu would begin with the Pallava example – the Candraprabhā temple in eth Jaina temples complex at Tiruparuttikunram or Jinakāñci, a suburb of Kancipuram...The Temple as a whole must be assigned to the 8th century although the upper parts appear to be a faithful reconstruction in brick during the Vijayanagara period." [229]

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[229] K. R. Srinivasan and H. Sarkar, "South India: Popularity of Jainism", in Jaina Art and Architecture, vol. II, part IV, 'Monuments , and Sculpture – AD 600 to 1000'; p. 209

Sale / gift of land for temples happens in the early / medieval times by urar or people – shift from royal charters. But king's regnal years are mentioned as a format. Jaina community now seems to be responsible for maintenance and upkeep of its temples, sacred centres. Or creating new donations for temples. Land transactions are happening between urar (sometimes non Jainas too), many veḷḷāḷas, probably. Everyday interaction and transactions are important. See Karandai, for instance. At Kīlsāttamaṅgalam the record mentions maintenance of lake by ūrār. Also at Tirumalai – nos. 327; 339.

As for the grant of lands excluding palliccandam there are two ways of interpreting these. 1. That patronage extended to Jainas alongside brahmins; 2. Settling brahmins / introducing brahmin establishment in lands where already Jainas settled. Introducing, consequently, a universal brahminical ideology and processes which would, in course of time, be instrumental in declining number of Jainas from these places.

An interesting inscription from the point of view of community and worship, the Tirunarungondai inscription mentioning the 'tai festival (4th harvest, noted earlier) reflects a continuity here of a different kind – in today's context the Tamil Jainas gather for the naṟkātci.

In all the inscriptions the following divisions are mentioned - Paṅgalanāḍu, Palkunṟattukkōṭṭam, Rājarājavalanāḍu, Siṅgapuranāḍu, Venkunṟattukkōṭṭam, Ponnūrnāḍu agrarian divisions.

Wherever land given transaction is affected between ūrār and the Jaina paḷḷis – relationship is forged between these two segments. It may be interesting to see how it would change over years, influenced by ideology and state – brāhmiṇical Śaiva movement. considering that Śaiva veḷḷāḷa question of conversion was a historical fact. Could it also have been one reason for consistent decline in Jaina agricultural settlements over the years?

A Note on Layers of History, Memory and Community's Construction of Past

This being so, one will end with a few reflections on the community's perspectives, perceptions of seeing their history in Tamiḻakam.

There are layers of history that people remember. At the topmost layer (of something that they remember immediately when one asks the question) their village is the central focus. It tells one of their construction – of themselves, their history, their place in their (and a larger history) of that village, of the community. In many cases inscriptional records do not figure in their seeking 'sanction' of a 'glorious' past. But the past is important to them, as is history. Not everything they relate to mythology, nor do they resort to myth making, in the most cases. There may be a few stories like Dharmadevi helping Akaḷaṅka in the debate (Karandai) but it is 'rooted' in Karandai.And the goddess is the goddess (yakṣi) *of* Karandai, not simply the yakṣī, Dharmadevi of the larger Digambara Jaina tradition as the protective deity of a tīrthaṅkara. Karandai in this case, is the central point of the story and becomes part of the collective memory of the community; their history.

Thus, their place in history is vectored through the history of their village; the association of their village vectored through history of their religion; their village in the history of Tamil Jaina religion, its place there.

Each village has its own importance within a circulatory space – sacred and secular; antiquity of the village and its link with religion is something everybody stresses on.

What do they invoke, when speaking of the past?

The community's relation to its history; the ones who fare better than the rest – average – invoke the past and the Jaina ascendancy; the poorer classes and the ones who are at present tilling their own lands (for many, this itself spells the decline in their status) and marginal farmers, speak of the Jaina community at present – in terms of economic status (being at the decline). Some own an acre or even less than one acre of land. Past and its glory is not something these classes relate to. Class consciousness is definitely part of the construction of history. There seems a link between present status and perspective on their history as a community.

So they mention the change – in Veṇbākkam as a case (but could do for other such villages too) – where in the past over 400 acres belonged to Tamil Jainas, now only 50 acres are theirs. At Tiruppaṇamūr there were 26 Tamil Jaina teachers, 20 years ago, and now only 4 – 5 teachers. These are also ways in which they evaluate the past against the present.

Since the last 20 years or so, many are moving away from agriculture as an occupation. There is change in wealth in

terms of land, education, mobility. But some sort of cohesiveness too, which may be invisible, but does exist in help offered to the poor (among them). But not in marriage ties which is among, more or less, equals.

The place for histories that people have constructed over centuries, or a few hundred years – is important as a source. Where substantiated it can produce a marvellous document of history, but even where unsubstantiated by "recorded history" these histories symbolise people's construction of their role in a moving time, in a region, in language, which is equally important for historians today trying to re-construct history of a living community. For instance, the information provided by T. Rajagopalan (whom we met at Arpakkam), an independent scholar in a small village Arpakkam with a collection of Buddhist and Jaina literature and history, making note of all the 'conversions' of Jaina and Buddhist temples into Hindu temples, around his area. He has been bringing it to notice of trained historians, or the media. His own community identity (which he also points out) is important. As 'nīrpūci Nayiṉār' or Śaiva veḷḷāḷla, he comes from his own history of being a convert from a Jaina. He takes me to his home which is very like a Jaina home, the threshold marks – symbols over their doors, of a pot, their food culture, eating dinner by 7 pm, vegetarianism and so on. Even if they were not Jainas who converted back to Śaivism, who are these people? How are they so similar to the Tamil Jainas? What is their history?

Village, for the Tamil Jainas, then is the 'theatre' where history is played out; and in that process gives the community its identity, besides other identities such as caste, language and so forth. There is the historical tangible past that they will identify – the inscription, the temple, and

so on. That gives one kind of sanctity. Then the stories of acaryas visiting. Or villages' importance in the maṭham. At Viḻukkam we came across the story of agrahāram and cow dung thrown at Jaina muṇi during Desingu rājā's time.

That Nīlakeci was composed in Pūṇḍi was something I learnt only from people living around Āraṇi. Pūṇḍi is important for them to have a sense in the history of Tamil Jainas. And composition of Nīlakeci, the text, becomes another important factor towards that end.

Similarly in Peramaṇḍūr people believed that Śrīpurāṇam was written there.

Since Kīḻeḍaiyālam does not have a history of an ancient past, and the temple is a modern one; its story about the siddhantam vanishing; and the Iḍaiyālam kuṟavañci becomes important.

In these grants to acaryas, etc, the community is also building its own group of sacred centres. In early periods while these are the sacred centres, in later periods temples overtake these.[230] The nature of sacred centres changes and that change is perceived through these inscriptions and what they contain.

Early inscription show donations to acaryas, getting made the bed for monks and nuns. Later, donations are made to the deity, the tīrthaṅkara at the temple, cum palli, or to the

[230] Refer to Siva Adinath (Poṉṉūrmalai – where he says that monkhood as an institution is no longer there in Tamilnadu. There may be some truth in it; with temples that came up, influenced by other religious systems, perhaps. Though some believe (including some scholars on Jainism in Tamilnadu) that the Jainas built temples first and 'Hindus' followed later- debatable.

yakṣi. This is an important shift.[231] A group of lay followers donating for the acrayas is important and it says nothing about land, etc. These sites become sacred by virtue of these acts of the laity. And of acaryas staying there. Today there seems to be a 'linking up' happening again. A move by few Tamil Jainas to resume these activities. They are trying to build up a resource centre at Poṉṉūrmalai, even as the site has got some recent additions, and becomes part of the Tamil Jaina pilgrimage circuit.

If these inscriptions and the narratives do not make any sense in terms of connectivity, perhaps that was what was meant to be conveyed. At the most the antiquity of the place they relate to 'historically', for some, still remains inscriptional records which give historical validity to the existence of Jainas in Tamiḻakam in a certain period. Where they make sense of the historical past, it can be seen in some of the narratives. But lived history for most part for them – or what they represent – is a shared cultural heritage with the language Tamil which is not something we find in any of the inscriptional records; or for that matter the fact of a community continuously drawing on different periods of the past. An ancient past, and a less ancient past. These movements may not have been visible in the above study. But this is a starting

[231] T. S. Sripal, Samaṉar Malai, Varthamana Patippakam, Chennai, 1996, p. 30. I thank Mr. Anantharaj Jain who gave me his personal copy of this book, out of print now.

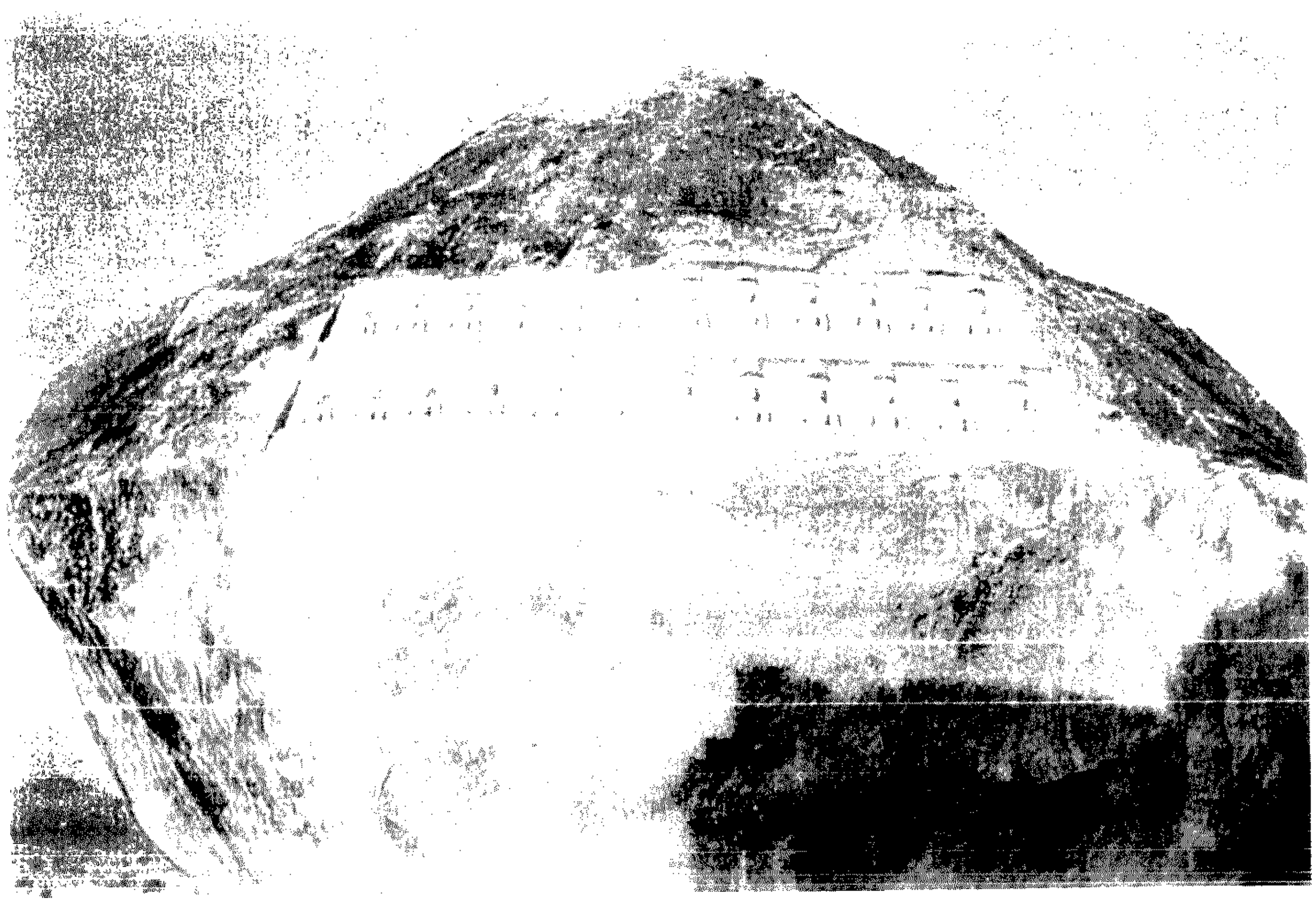
point of an idea of exploration.[232] And there can only be few points of analysis drawn from the epigraphical evidence in a context where Jainism in Tamilnadu has been exhaustively studied using epigraphical evidences. There can be little to add on the details of the records – as scholars of great repute have already worked years on these to bring out a chronological order of the same. Their contribution is not in question here. Nor is there a question on use of these records. The question is however, how does one, trying to understand conflict and identity as concepts in history work with these records, if not by setting them against the community's narratives of its history and culture, and seek the community in these records? For most part almost none of these records give any evidence of community concerns and community history. They can at the most reveal the support to institutions and the temple worship paradigm; and of course, details of agrarian settlements and nature of agricultural resources going into maintenance of these Jaina institutions – paḷḷis. Again, much more work needs to be done on the last point, to be able to draw any definitive or near definitive conclusion about the Tamil Jaina agricultural community through inscriptional records.

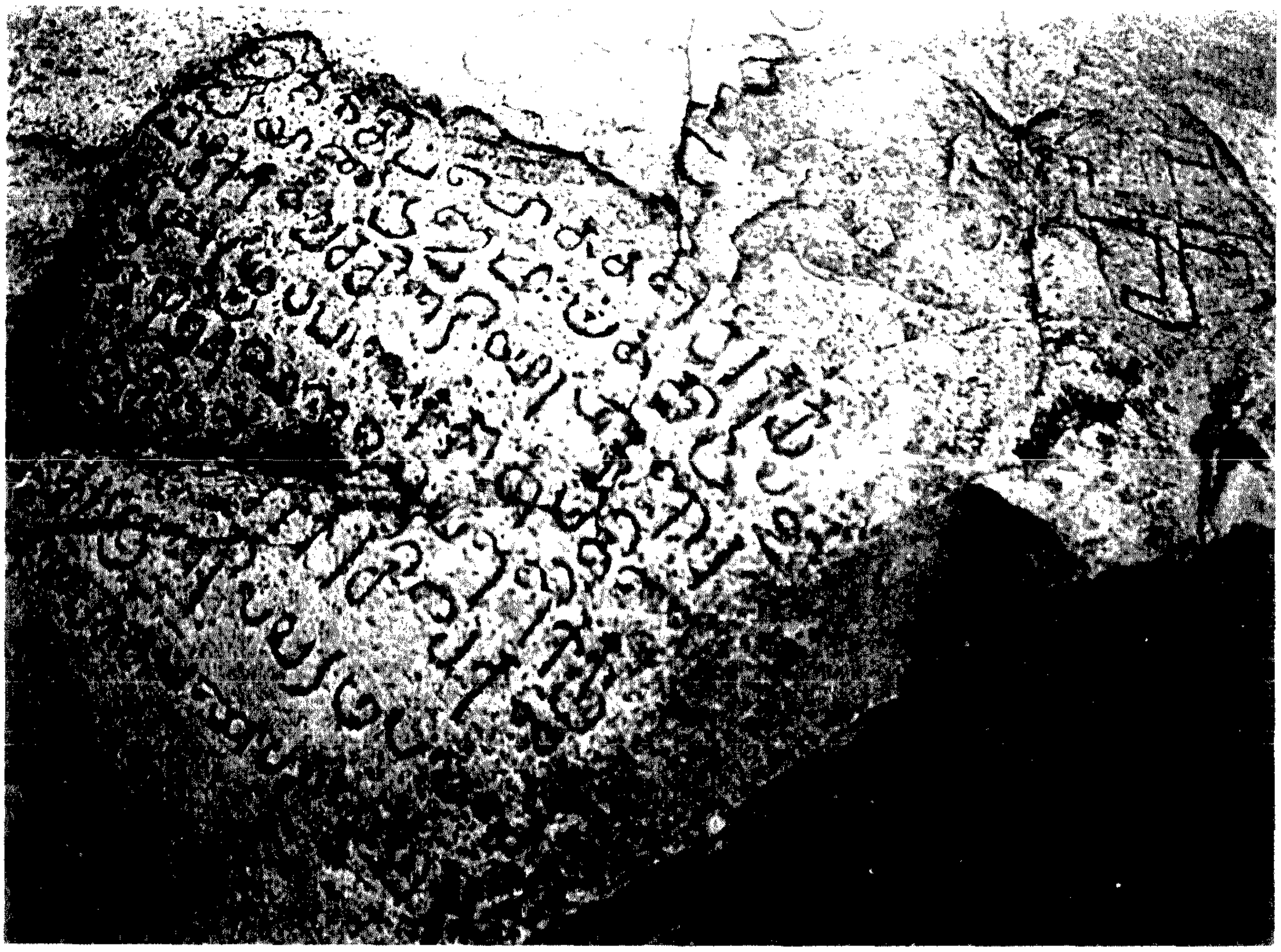
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[232] I thank all the Tamil Jainas who took time out to speak to me. And I must mention that this does not purport to be a record of all the narratives of the community. Many villages one could not visit; even where one did, one could not record the narratives. In any case, there can yet be one single complete (or final) account of the history of any single community in India. The complexities are far too many to capture in a study with a limited scope and within limited time-frame. This is just a beginning of an exploration of possibilities.



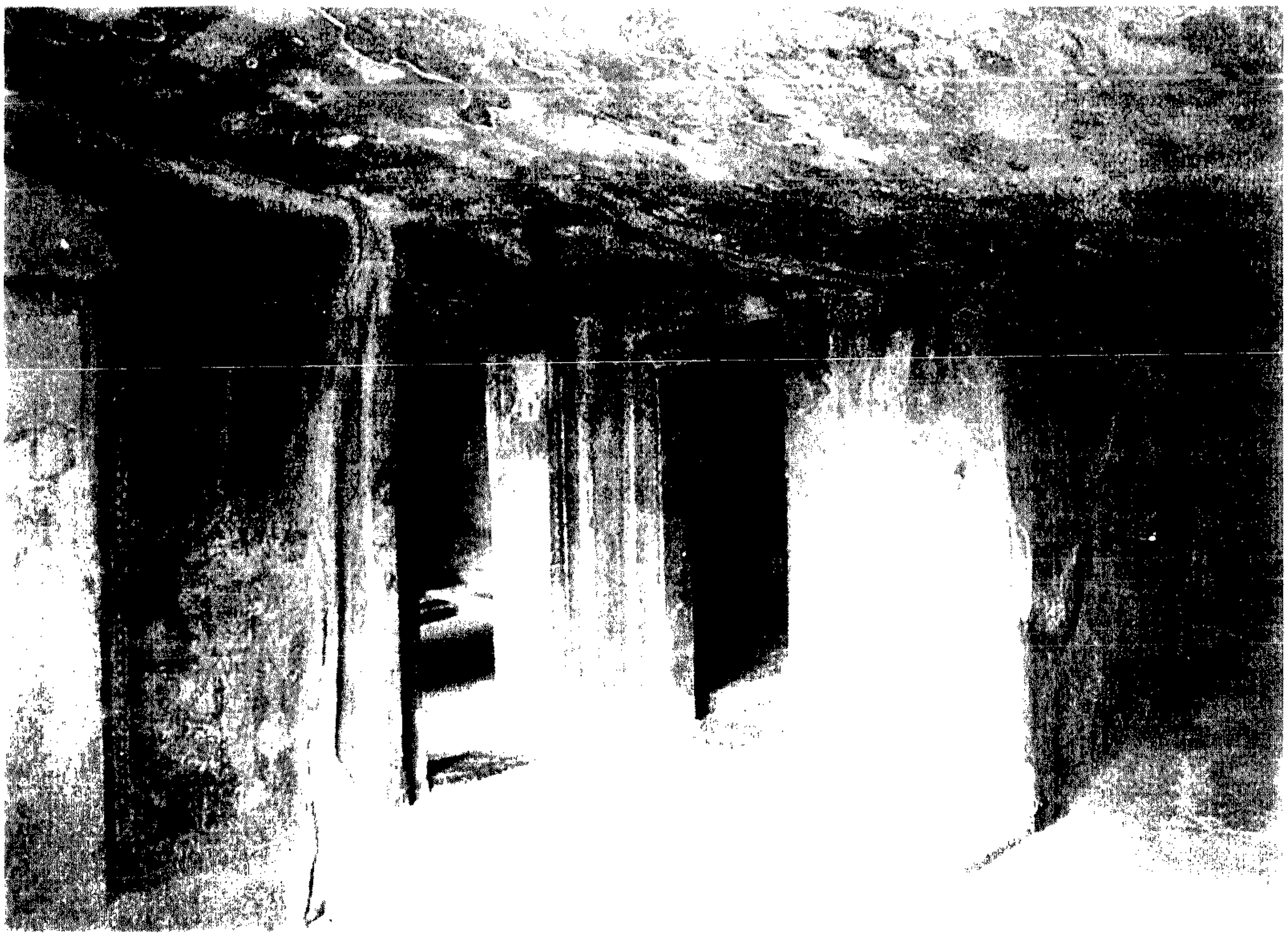
Above and below: Tirunatharkunru Rock (site of sallekhana of Digambara munis, sacred to the Tamil Jainas) with images of 24 tirthankaras; Detail





Above and below: At Ksattamangalam, on a rock locally called Perumalparai
8th century Tamil inscription; Residents of the village in the backdrop





Painted rock-cut cave at Tirumalai



Detail of painted ceiling at Candiranathar temple, Tiruparuttikunram (Jinakancipuram)



Above and below: Inside the rock-cut shrine at Tirunarungondai; a natural cavern with beds.



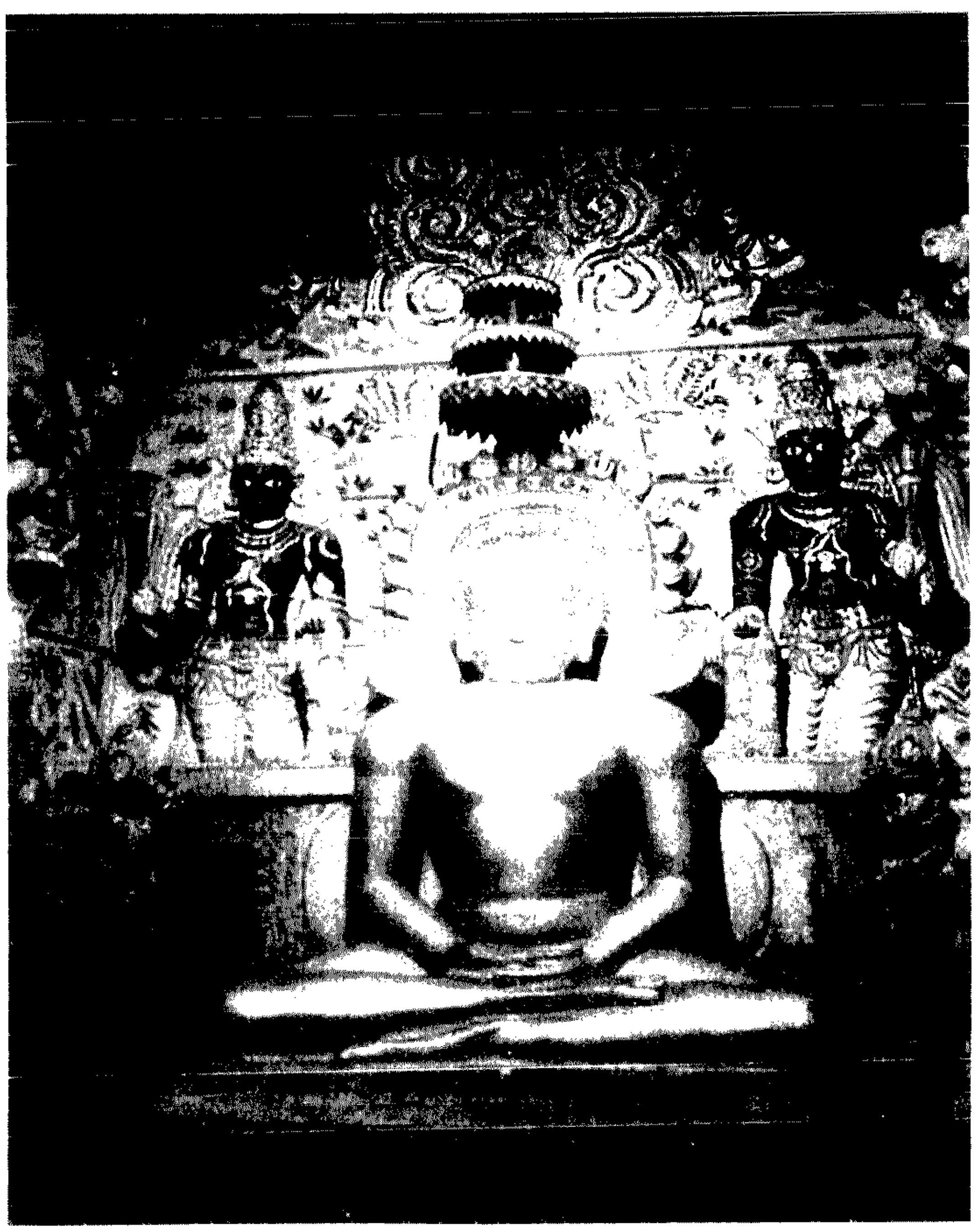


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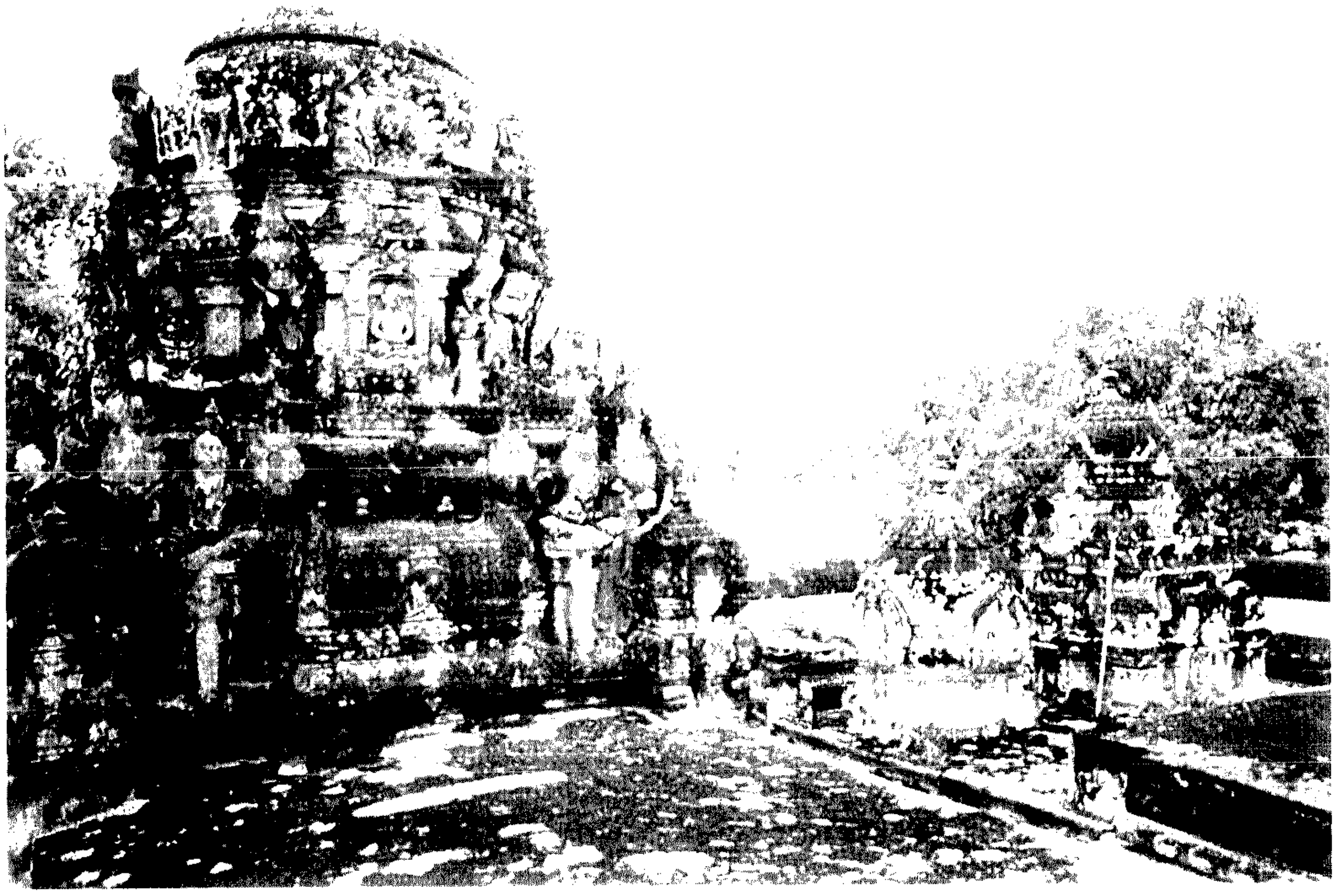




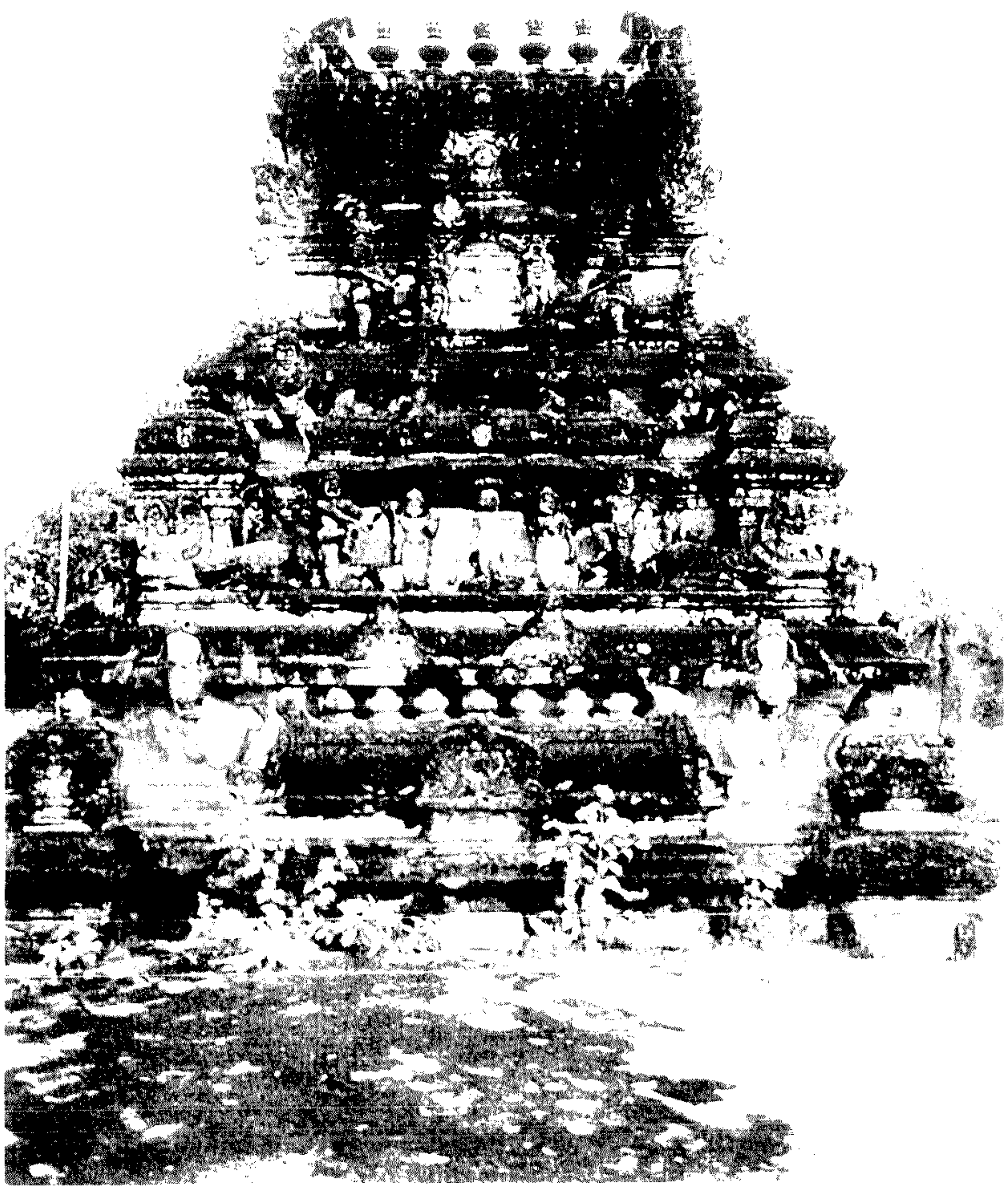
Adinatha - Karandai

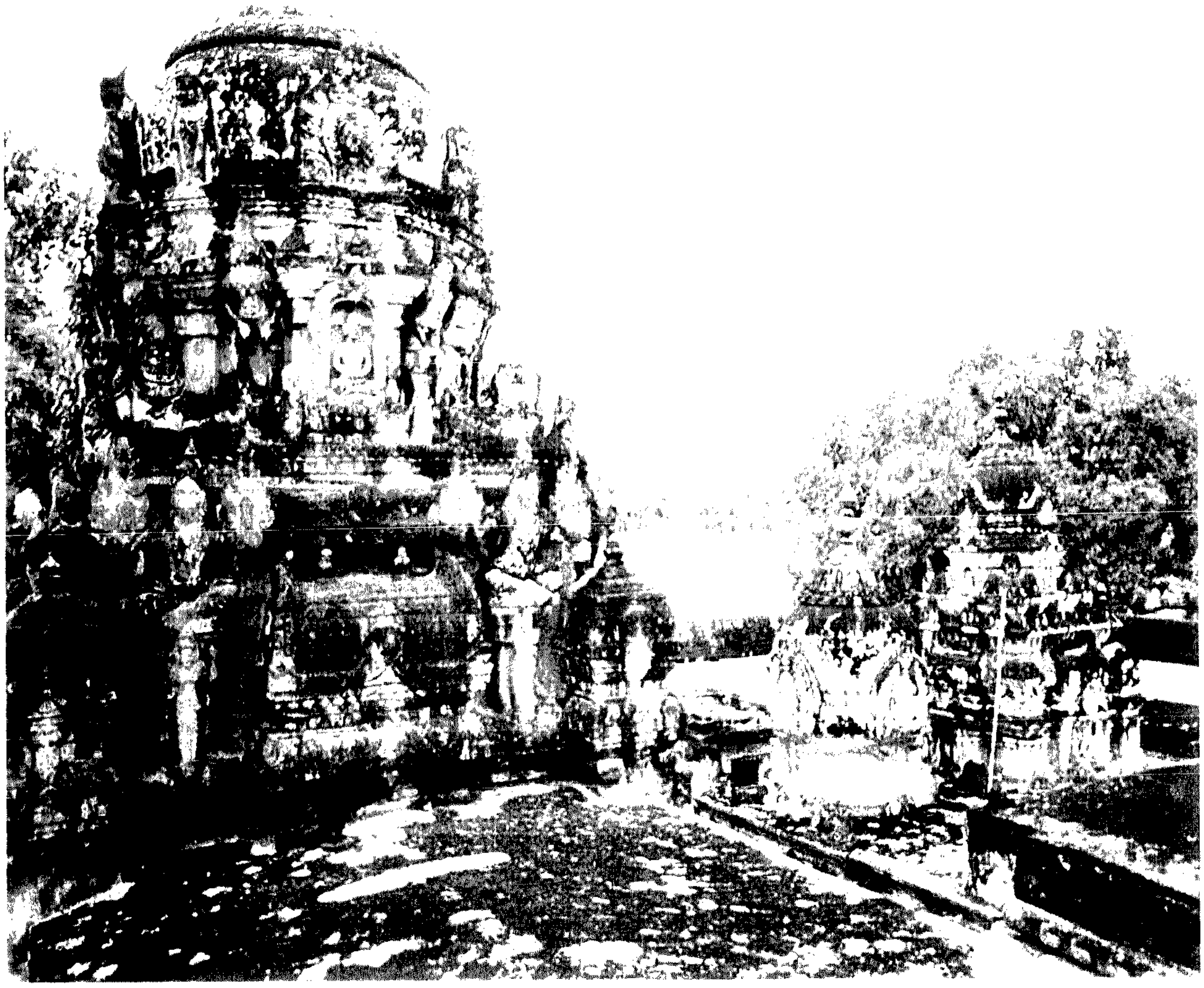


Parsvanatha Karandai

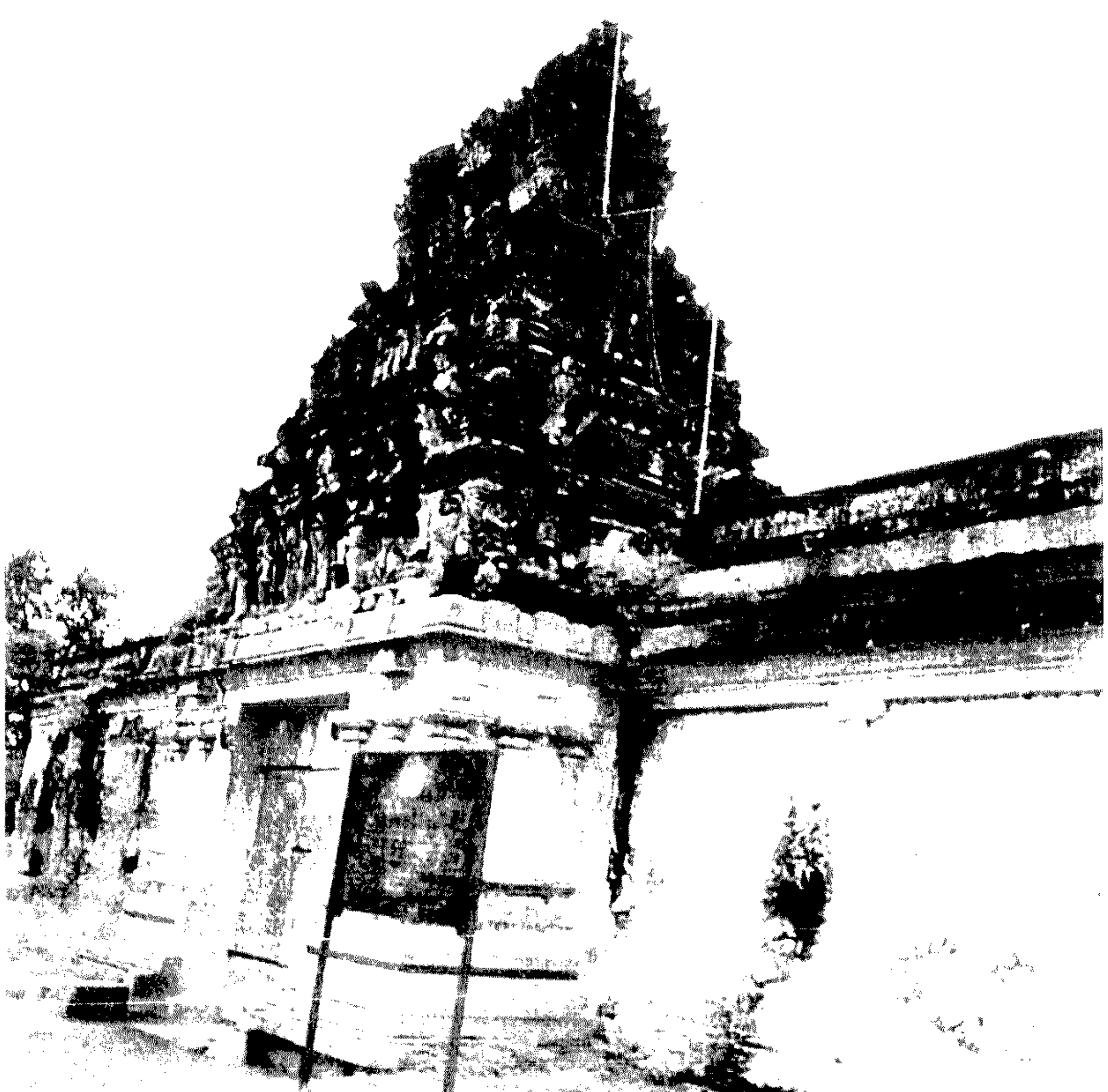


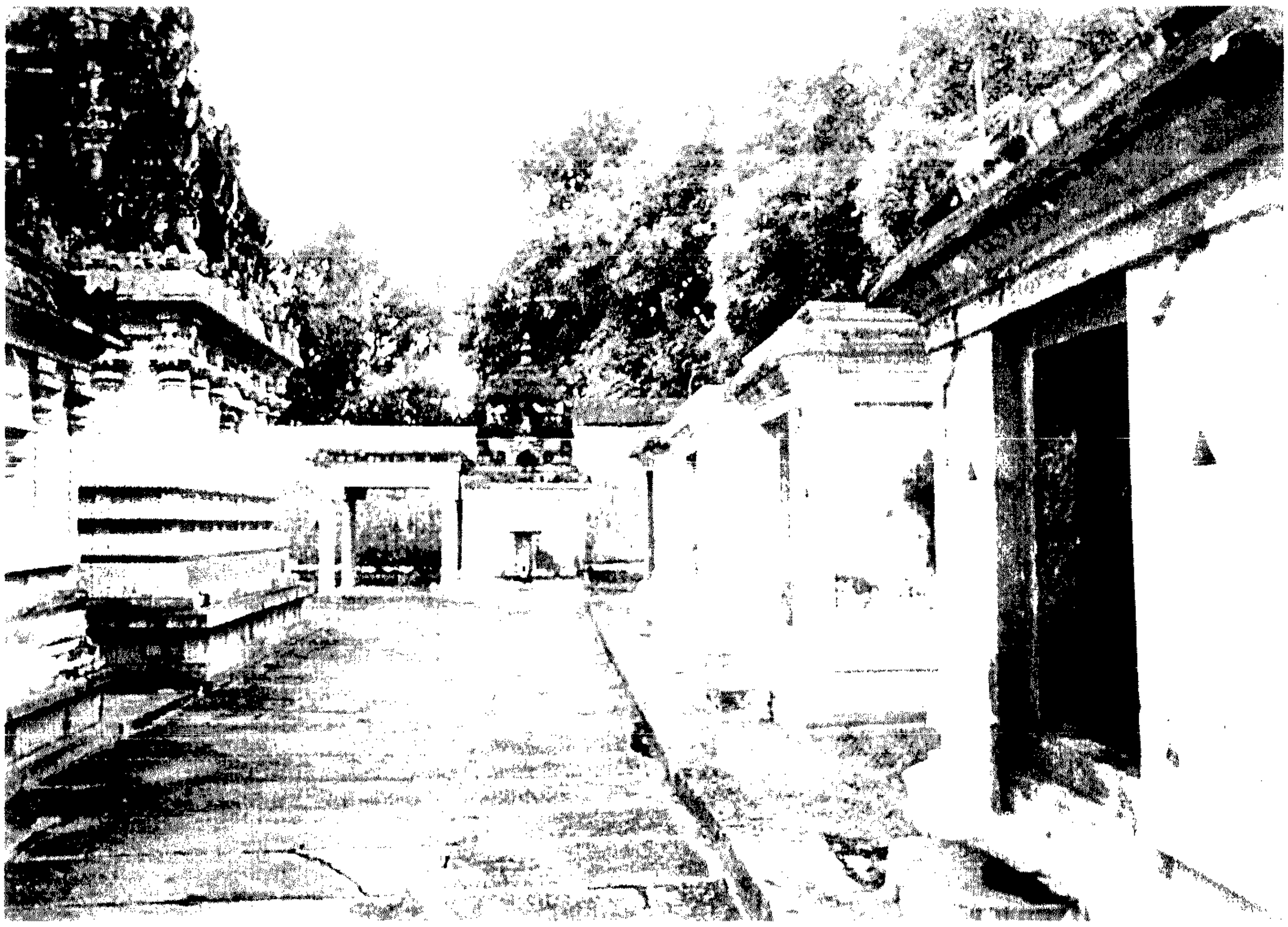
One of the gopurams of the Pundi temple; main gopuram (below). The temple is a protected monument under the ASI.



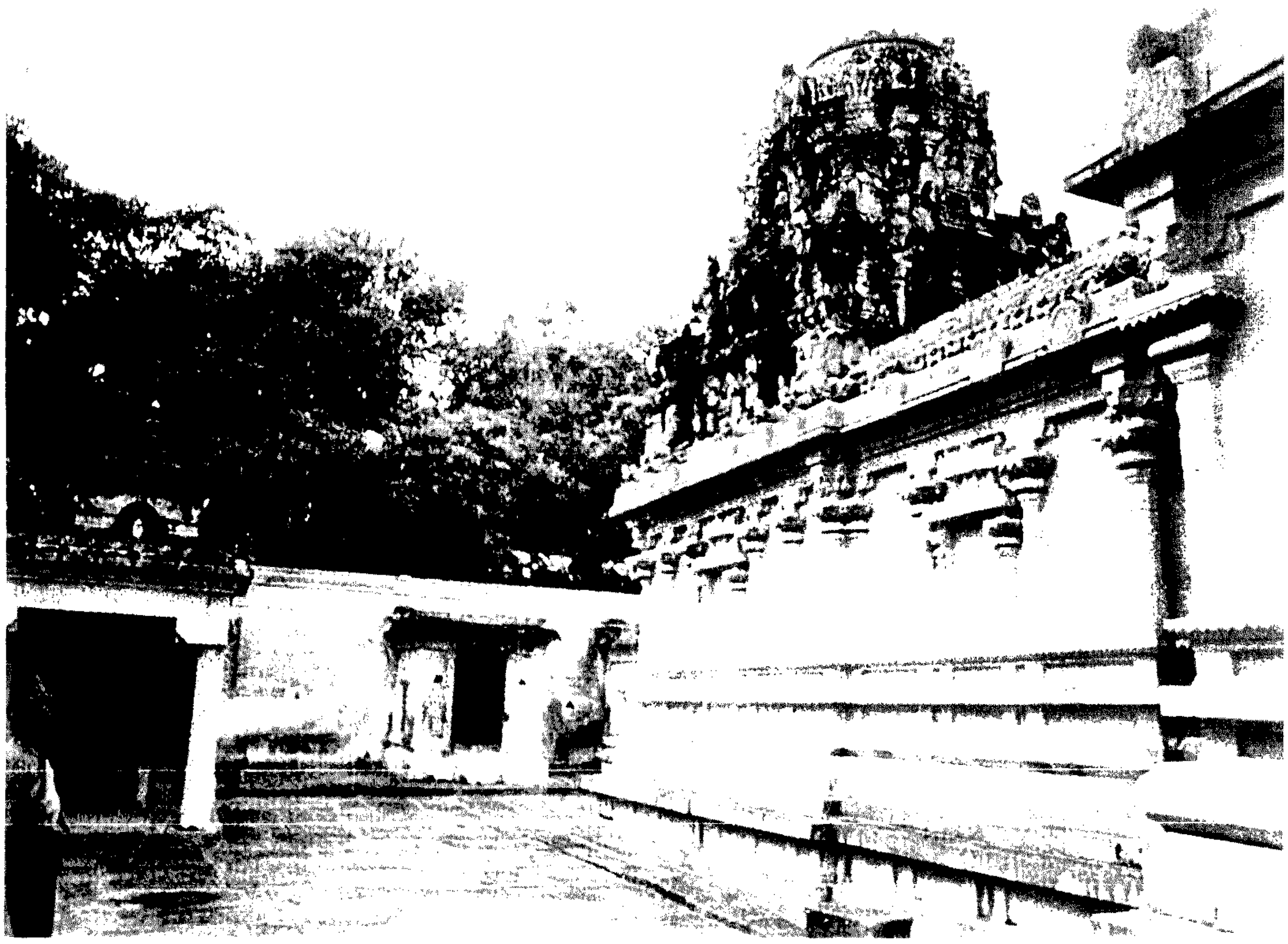


Above and below: Detail of the gopuram; the temple entrance, with the ASI (rusted) board

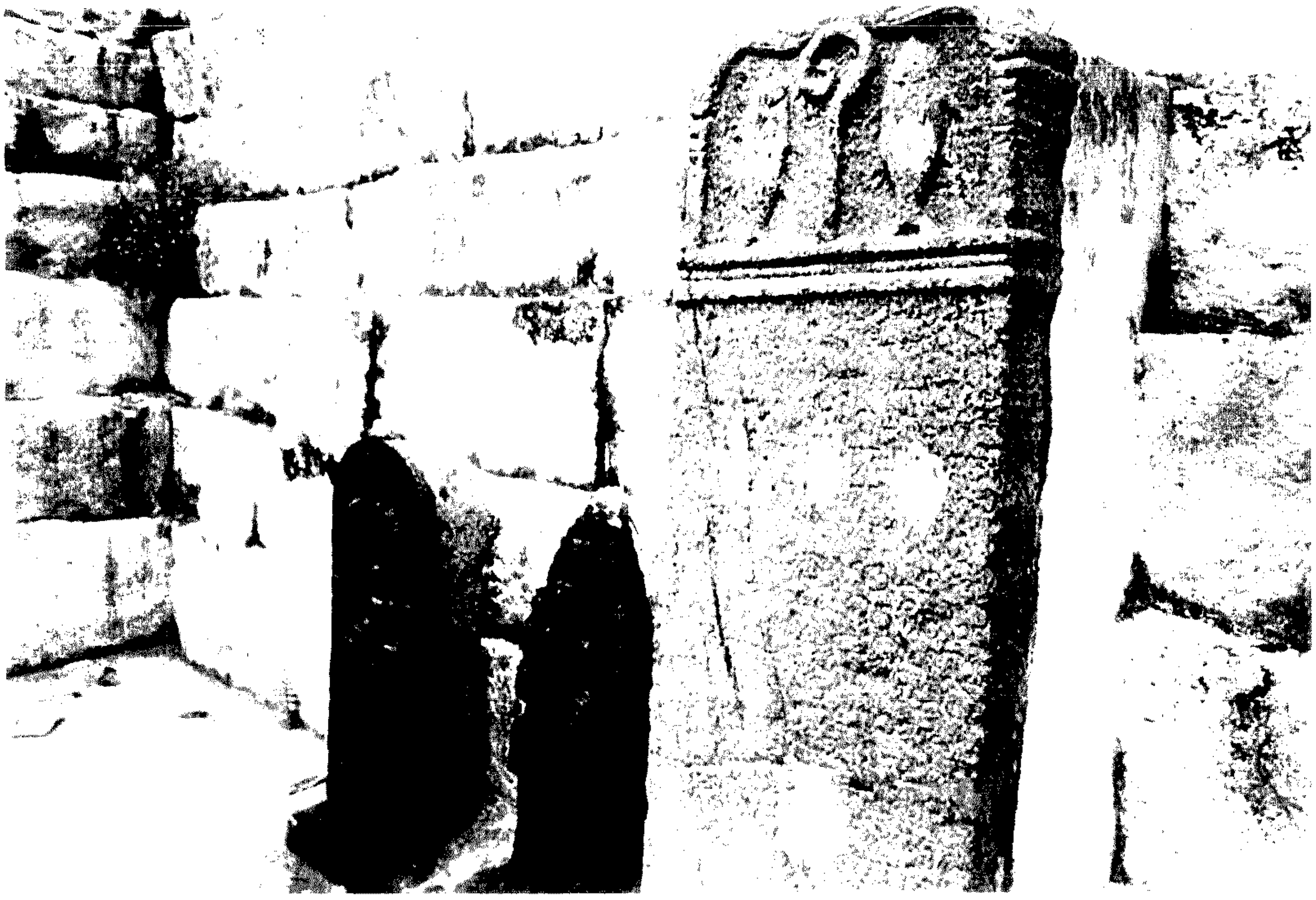




Part of the Pundi temple complex, with subsidiary shrines in the compound



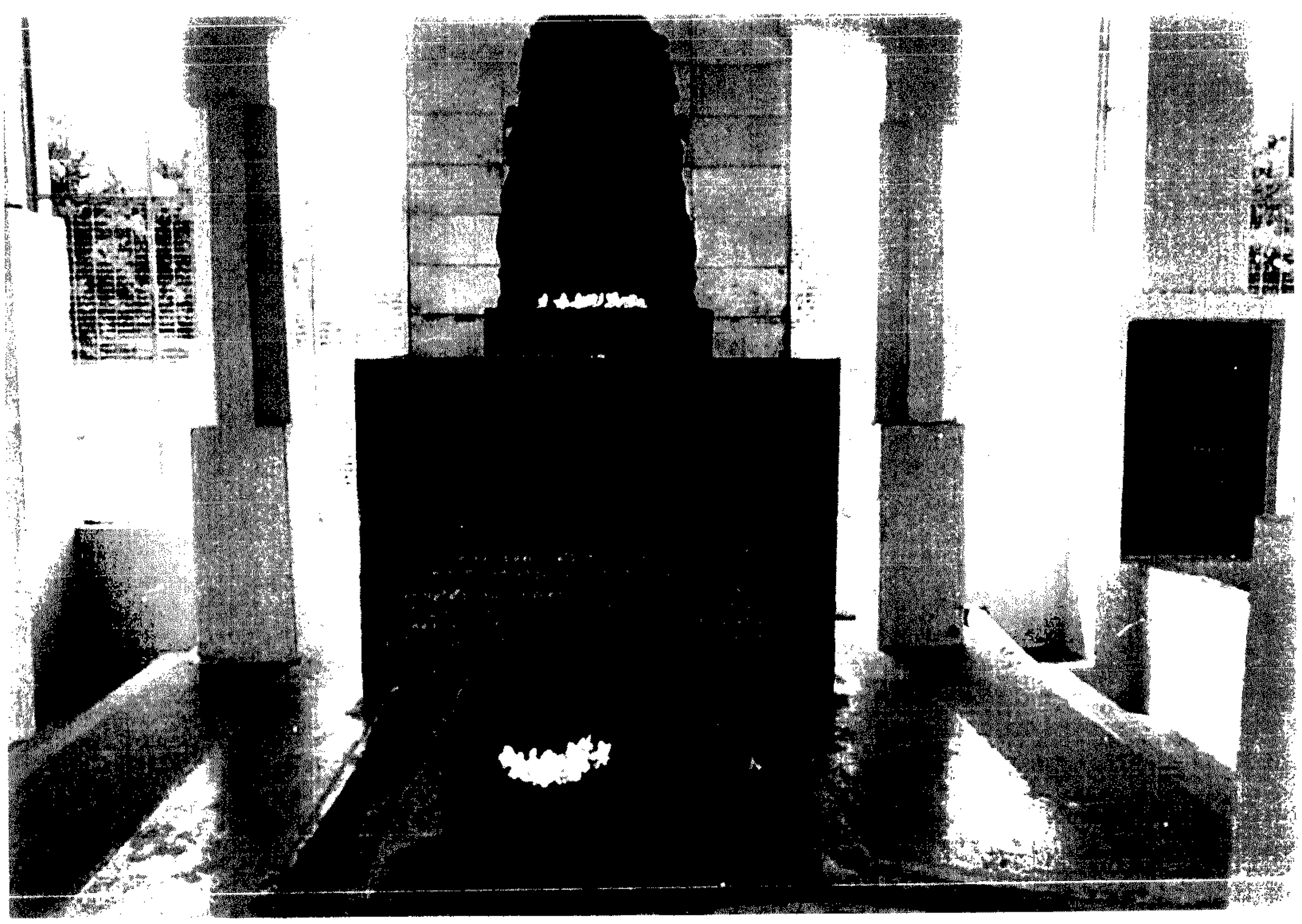




Temple at Tirunarungondai (top); Image of Sanisvara (probably later addition) besides that of Parsvanatha at Tirunarungondai (below)



Yaksa Brahmadevar – Karandai



Tiruvalluvar Mandapam at Kundakundanagar, Ponnurmalai dedicated to Acarya Kundakundacarya, author of the Kural

Chapter V

Conclusion

In this long journey one has tried to understand the layers of history of the Tamil Jaina community. And the one 'conclusion' - to use a term that 'closes' more than it 'opens' spaces for further interpretations, and a term that may not be forcibly used by historians, continually reinterpreting the past – that I could make was this. State patronage is not the only yardstick to write the history of Jainism in Tamilnadu.

Though the nature of the 'conclusion' is not new to historical method any more today, yet, it is important to make this point for scholarship on 'Jainism in Tamilnadu' to a great extent continues to rely upon state patronage and a certain kind of sources to read the history of a living community.

There may have been the good phases, bad phases, worst phases in the lived history of the Tamil Jainas, but one has refused to use the terms 'rise' and 'decline' / 'fall' consistently through this journey. One has tried to seek processes that involved the community's movement through the early occupations, proselytisation, popularisation of the Jaina doctrine among the Tamils through a phase that helped popularise it further, through textual contributions, and so forth; to the phase of becoming marginal again, with the onslaught of the bhakti, in one period, to that of the Nāyaka ruler in another, and finally, to reach a stage where even mentioning the term "Tamil Jaina" evokes questions, where they are virtually hidden in any writing of the modern period in Tamilnadu, through its interesting and dynamic socio-

political movements. This, in essence is what 'persecution' must be seen to have done to a community. To force it to the fringes. And that can have been the history of any marginalised community in the history of modern India. One has simply presented a concept, a mode of questioning for the study of the Tamil Jainas as one of those examples.

One has noted (while not giving it too much 'word-space', for obvious reasons) the tide of bhakti and abuse of the Jainas in the bhakti bards' compilations. In this period many converted to Śaiva or Vaiṣṇava faiths. Many Jaina (and Buddhist) centres were turned into Vaisnavite and Saivite centres of worship, settlements. Numerous early Jaina centres, incidentally, interestingly, as one has noted, became centres of Murukaṉ-Subrahmaṇya later, this deity himself retaining only a fraction of his early association with Tamil-ness, as the god of love, and companion of Valli, the daughter of a tribal chieftain in the hills of Tamilnadu.

One has learnt about different ways in which to perceive the very concept of persecution. But there are, again layers to it, which may have been missed out in previous works on the Jainas , For persecution is not merely about the blatant episodic ....of impaling the Jaina munis on stakes , taking out processions enacting the same and so on. The violence of the concept can and should be seen in other senses as well. It must be seen in the way an overarching is created to the exclusion of certain communities ...in understanding of the past. One has noted the Śaiva Veḷḷāḷa tradition and the possibility of understanding the same through the views of the Tamil Jainas who have their own versions of how some of them turned Śaiva veḷḷāḷas. And share many practices, ideas of history, civilisation. Persecution has to be seen in ways that the community senses it – the letter to Gandhi, for

instance from a Barrister in London regarding a remark made on Jaina monks. Or Sripal viewing the ritual enactment of abuse of Jaina women in celebrating the Śaiva bard Gñāna Sambandar; or in the way the temples in Arpakkam and Magaral were converted into Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava temples (with a sculpted figure of Mahāvira lying outside the temple precincts even to this date, in a place settled by the Jainas); or in the HMV record episode. It has to be seen in the stories constructed about the Jainas, in the Śaiva talapurāṇams, as much as in the stories the Jainas narrate about a certain king who forced them to flee, or convert. It has to be 'read between the lines', so to speak, where 'hard evidence' does not help. And sometimes if the hard evidence itself represents an elite section, there are further problems.

This is where the importance of the cakkiḷi rājā story lies.

And it has to be seen also in the fact that modern interpretations of movements in Tamil politics seem to negate the community that keeps reiterating its distinct identity and wishes inclusion as a minority or backward classes. Because the mirror through which some scholarship looks at the community is that of the affluent (more or less, 'Hindu') Jaina businessmen of Chennai, or other towns. Or the Jainas of elsewhere. Thus, a subtle point of political important gets missed out, that the Tamil Jainas identify with the caste movements in Tamilnadu, against brāhmiṇism and Śaivism.

The point of Jaina identity and Tamil language was something one learnt through the travels in the Tamil Jaina countryside. The language, the region, builds its identity as much as its being Jaina, in a pan Jaina sense.

The pressure of survival makes the community respond in interesting ways as well. Literature and literary contributions never seem to die, through this entire period. But contestation occurs in edited volumes of Tamil literary texts, coming with their own colouring. Which, again, is important for the historian. To look at the way each community tries to own up Tamil litterateur. One has touched upon Kuṟaḷ. One has accepted the 'conclusion' (herein) that the author was a Jaina.

Nīlakeci was in interesting discovery. A character that asked to be textualised. Nīli asking to be Nīlakeci, almost. Hence the dream and the breaking of rules of the agamas and constructing a new image for a possession spirit, transforming a *pēy* into a philosopher, debator. To prove the thin line, perhaps, that divides 'being', from 'becoming' (where the basic ethos of Jaina religion lies). All it needs is a character willing enough to let go of past associations for a while, and immerse herself into the arguments of *jīva*, good and bad karma, the right conduct, and so on. The character may 'slip back' into her older associations (like the *chiṇḍika* stories one has mentioned in a different context) to become *pēy* again, towards a Jaina goal of winning over her opponent of the materialist (pūtavāta / Bhūtavada) school, Piśācaka. Her painful long journey, however, culminates in meeting the right teacher – has to be a Jaina monk – and the right doctrine, again, that of the Jina. A redemption none of the brāhmiṇical, Śaivite, or other traditions could afford her. In this too, lies the Jaina response to the historical moment that it (the Jaina tradition) faced.

Some non-Tamil texts were Tamilised, or, at least, translated, such as the Bṛhatkathā into Peruṅkatai in the 8th

century AD. And adopting popular idioms became important to Jaina Tamil literary tradition.

Miraculous powers of healing stories were also styled - the bhaktamara stotram by Mānatuṅga (a renowned teacher by the 13th century AD) to 'goddess' Cakreśvari, the guardian deity of Ṛṣabha.

In the long history of Tamiḻakam, in reality all doctrines were taking forma common layer, it is the nature and extent of the power (the hegemony) and the magnitude of domination (at the cost of) that is crucial to a study of these processes. After all, religious philosophy has had to address itself ultimately to the struggles of everyday, and develop practices, rituals, to this end. The Jainas developed two (parallel, perhaps) levels of addressing this question – the metaphysical contemplation and a very basic discourse with the commoner. They lived on, and have lived, to this day in Tamilnadu, though marginalised, but the Buddhists did not, and moved out. In that lies the moment of historical truth that one has tried to understand from a different perspective.

Like a quotation from Hemacandra (in the chapter on the community) said – it is perhaps about finding the Jainas from among those hundreds of (metaphorical) Pāṇḍavas [1]. Seeking the hidden behind what is the 'perceived totality' or the 'given' as one has referred to earlier.

A word about the 'hard evidence' and what Karashima poetically referred to as listening to what they 'whispered', there was little more to add to the already existing (exhaustive) enormous and excellent scholarship using this

[1] Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman, Sanjay Subramaniam, Textures of Time: Writing History in South India (1600 – 1800), Permanent Black, Delhi, 2001.pp.15-16

material (which still seems to be, tends to be seen as, the material par excellence for a historian); except to place it in a context. That of the narratives of the community, juxtaposed against the 'antiquity' of their associations with the 'historical' existence of their village which these records 'prove'. The idea was to show a certain sense of historical continuity of the Tamil Jainas and see how they relate to the 'historicity' of the place. Do they claim it importance from the existence of these lithic records or through some other means? Does it mean more that a certain someone from among them attained nirvana through sallekhana vratam, or that the place had a temple with inscriptions referring to the rule of the Cholas or Pallavas, or other kings? How far back do they go to give their own histories? How important does the village become in their view? One has not made a judgment on the significance of these sources nor those that use them; just presented a different way of looking at them, trying to understand them. Since one does also visit the place and initially look for 'historical' 'vestiges' of any kind, that will put them on the map of importance in the construction of history. But is there need to go beyond that? One has not been able to 'conclude'.

Can one the, 'conclude', to give the final statement about issues that urge so many layers of the 'text', and the 'reading', at the same time? Except to say that in each of the sections of this journey is a 'beginning' or so it has been constructed. To urge a revisit, or a new journey, with the Tamil Jainas.

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Annexure - 1

Early and Present day Tamil Jaina Villages (and Corresponding Temples for Tirthankaras)[1]

Early Jaina Sravaka Settlements as mentioned in the epigraphs:

1. Vellarai
2. Tondi
3. Ponai
4. Potalai
5. Tidiyal
6. Elaiyur
7. Venpalli
8. Nagaperu (Nagamalai)
9. Patimu
10. Nelveli
11. Naliyur
12. Karur
13. Yarrur (Arrur)
14. Pakanur
15. Kunrattur

[As noted in I. Mahadevan, Corpus of Tamil Brahmi Inscriptions, Cre-A Publications, pp.4 – 12]

1. Agarakarakkottai: Parsvanathar
2. Agalur: Adinathar
3. Arungulam: Candranathar (?)
4. Anumanthakkudi: Parsvanathar
5. Ananthapuram (Arni): Ananthanathar
6. Annamangalam: Adinathar
7. Ayalavadi: Adisvarar
8. Arni: Adinathar
9. Arnipalayam: Adinathar
10. Arpakkam: Adibhattarakar (Adinathar)
11. Alagramam: Adinathar
12. Esakkulattur: Mahaveerar
13. Elanderipattu:Neminathar
14. Elangadu: Adinathar
15. Elamangalam: Ananthanathar
16. Uppuvellore: Rishabhanathar
17. Eyyil: Chandranathar
18. Etha Nemmeli: Neminathar
19. Odalavadi: Adinathar

[1] Information provided by Member, Samanar Pervoli Iyakkam. Note the prominence of Adinatha or Vrsbha Tirthankara temples showing the immense popularity of the first tirthankara; perhaps also signifying a sense of relating to the antiquity and 'origins' among the Tamil Jainas, to reiterate a sense of belonging to a really ancient past in Tamilakam. Of course, one cannot reduce it to this aspect, merely. Perhaps there are other reasons for this, which need to be explored some more.

20. Erumbur: Adisvara
21. Cuddalore: Adinathar
22. Karantai: Kunthunathar
23. Kallakulattur: Adinathar
24. Kallapuliyur: Parsvanathar
25. Kannalam: Chandranathar
26. Kattu Malaiyanur: Mahaveerar
27. Kappalur: Kunthunathar
28. Kiledayalam: Adinathar
29. Kilsattamangalam: Chandranathar
30. Kilvalayamur: Rishabhanathar
31. Kilvillivalam: Mahaveerar
32. Kundakundanagar: Adinathar
33. Kunnattur: Adinathar
34. Kumbakonam: Chandraprabha
35. Gudalur: Kunthunathar
36. Goonambadi: Mallinathar
37. Kollimalai: Mahaveerar
38. Koilampoondi: Mahaveerar
39. Chakkarapuram (Cengi / Gingee): Ananthanathar
40. Sadupperipalayam: Adinathar
41. Siddarugavoor: Adinathar
42. Sendiyabakkam: Parsvanathar
43. Cheyyar: Parsvanathar
44. Chennai: Chandranathar
45. Sendamangalam: Parsvanathar
46. Sevoor: Adinathar
47. Somasapadi: Chandranathar
48. Solai Arugavoor: Adinathar
49. Tachampadi: Mahaveerar
50. Tachhur: Adinathar
51. Tanjore: Adisvarar
52. Thayanur: Varthamanar
53. Tindivanam: Parsvanathar
54. Tirunarungunram: Appandainathar
55. Tiruparuttikunram: Varthamanaswami
56. Tirupparambur: Pushpadantar
57. Tirumalai: Neminathar
58. Tirakkoil: Mahaveerar
59. Theepangudi: Adinathar
60. Theelar: Trailokiyanathar
61. Thennathur: Adinathar
62. Desur:Adinathar
63. Thondur: Mahaveerar
64. Torappadi: Pushpadantar
65. Nallavanpalayam: Adinathar
66. Nallur: Adinathar
67. Naval: Vasupujyar
68. Nelliyangulam: Neminathar
69. Nethappakkam: Neminathar

70. Parikalpattu: Parsvanathar
71. Puzhal: Adinathar
72. Poondi: Adinathar
73. Pernamallur: Ponninathar
74. Periyakolappalur: Vrishabhanathar
75. Korakkotai: Vrishabhanathar
76. Perumandur: Adinathar & Chandranathar
77. Perumpukai: Mallinathar
78. Perani: Parsvanathar
79. Peravur: Varthamanaswami
80. Ponnur: Adinathar
81. Manjapattu: Mallinathar
82. Mannargudi: Mallinathar
83. Mudalur: Adinathar
84. Mullippattu: Mahaveerar
85. Melathipakkam: Anantanathar
86. Melcittamur: Simhapurinathar
87. Melmalaiyanur: Vrishabhanathar
88. Mezhiyunur: Parsvanathar
89. Mogappair: Chandraprabhar
90. Vangaram: Risbhanathar
91. Vandavasi: Mahaveerar
92. Valathi: Rishabhanathar
93. Vazhappandal: Varthamanar
94. Vijayamangalam: Chandranathar
95. Vichhur: Rishabhanathar
96. Virudur: Rishabhanathar
97. Vilukkam: Adinathar
98. Velangadupakkam: Mahaveerar
99. Veedur: Adinathar
100. Veeranamur: Vrishabhanathar
101. Venkunram: Parsvanathar
102. Venbakkam: Varthmanar
103. Vellimedupettai: Ananthanathar
104. Vellai: Adinathar
105. Vempundi: Neminathar
106. Velianallur: Mahaveerar
107. Kozhipalayam: Neminathar
108. Salukkai: Vrishabhanathar
109. Koozhamandal: Vrishabhanathar

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Annexure – 2

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Annexure – 3
Jain temples, centres in Tamilnadu, as per data gathered by the Tirumalai Jaina gurukulam – as per Images available at the gurukulam

1. Kilvayalanur
2. Thellar
3. Thayanur
4. Agarakkottai
5. Karandai
6. Arani Palayam
7. Tindivanam (not old center)
8. Ananthamangalam malai *Rock-cut caves)
9. Thondur Hill (Roc-cut cave)
10. Kovilpatti Kalugumalai (Rock – 24 tirthankaras)
11. Nallavanapalayam
12. Peramandur
13. Vizhukkam / Vilukkam
14. Perumpukai
15. Kallakulathur
16. Esakolathur
17. Vijayamangalam
18. Avalurpettai (Rock-cut cave)
19. Tirunarungondarm (Rock temple)
20. Tiruparuttikunram
21. Madurai POygaimalai (Rock caverns)
22. Arani Mullipattu
23. Vangaram
24. Madurai Karungalakudi (Rock –cut caves)
25. Mel Athipakkam
26. Thingalur
27. Cuddalore
28. Tirumalai (Rock cut caves and caverns)
29. Valthi
30. Vellore Kalani (only figure – of Parsva)
31. Peranamallur
32. Solai Arugayur
33. Kumbakonam (Candraprabha temple)
34. JInapuram (not old)
35. Thachur
36. Mannargudi
37. Melappandal
38. Kannalam (picture of Tirthankara has Svetambara iconographic features and in marble)
39. Naval (does not seem old and same as above)
40. Melcittamur (temple; shrine over the rock , Malainathar , built later)
41. Uppuvelur
42. Elangadu
43. Madurai Anaimalai (Rock-cut cave)
44. Kappalur (not old)
45. Desur

46. Nedimozhiyanur (marble tirthankara; Parsva, not too old)
47. Alagramam
48. Kilsattamangalam (renovated)
49. Madurai Kilavalavu (rock –cut and caverns)
50. Eyyil
51. Ethanammeli (looks new)
52. Elamangalam
53. Kattu Malayanur (look new)
54. Perani
55. Vempakkam (seems new / renovated)
56. Thondur
57. Madurai Kongarpuliyangulam (Rock-cut caves)
58. Vallimalai (same as above)
59. Kallappuliyur
60. Cendiyambakkam
61. Thanjavur Karandai
62. Arani Pundi
63. Cenji Hill (Rock – cut) Thirunatharkunru (24 tirthankaras on rock)
64. Pudukkottai Sittanavasal (Rock-cut)
65. Vidur
66. Tharakkoil (looks new , but old tirthankara figure)
67. Chennai Ambattur (new, but old figure)
68. Koonampadi (new / renovated)
69. Ponnurmalai
70. Salukkai
71. Chitrarugayur
72. Koodalur
73. Torappadi
74. Ceeyamangalam (Rock-cut)
75. Valaipandal
76. Othalavadi
77. Nethupakkam
78. Vellodu
79. Somasipadi
80. Ponnur
81. Tenathur
82. Venkunram
83. Viranamur
84. Malappambadi
85. Madurai Kalinjamalai (Rock-cut cave)
86. Ayalavadi (new?)
87. Periya kolappalur
88. Parikkalpattu (new)
89. Madurai Samanarmalai (Rock-cut)
90. Aranai Sevvur
91. Thensenthamangalam
92. Arani Ananthapuram
93. Koilampundi
94. Nelliyankulam
95. Madurai Alagarmalai (Rock caverns)

96. Vandavasi
97. Agalur
98. Tirunageswaram
99. Pudukkottai Anumanthakudi
100. Kilvillivanam
101. Deepangudi
102. Erumbur
103. Nallur
104. Tiruppanamur
105. Manjapattu
106. Cheyyar
107. Arpakkam
108. Velliyanallur
109. Melmalaiyanur
110. Perayur
111. Sathuperipalayam
112. Renderipattu (new / renovated0
113. Biruthur
114. Vellai

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